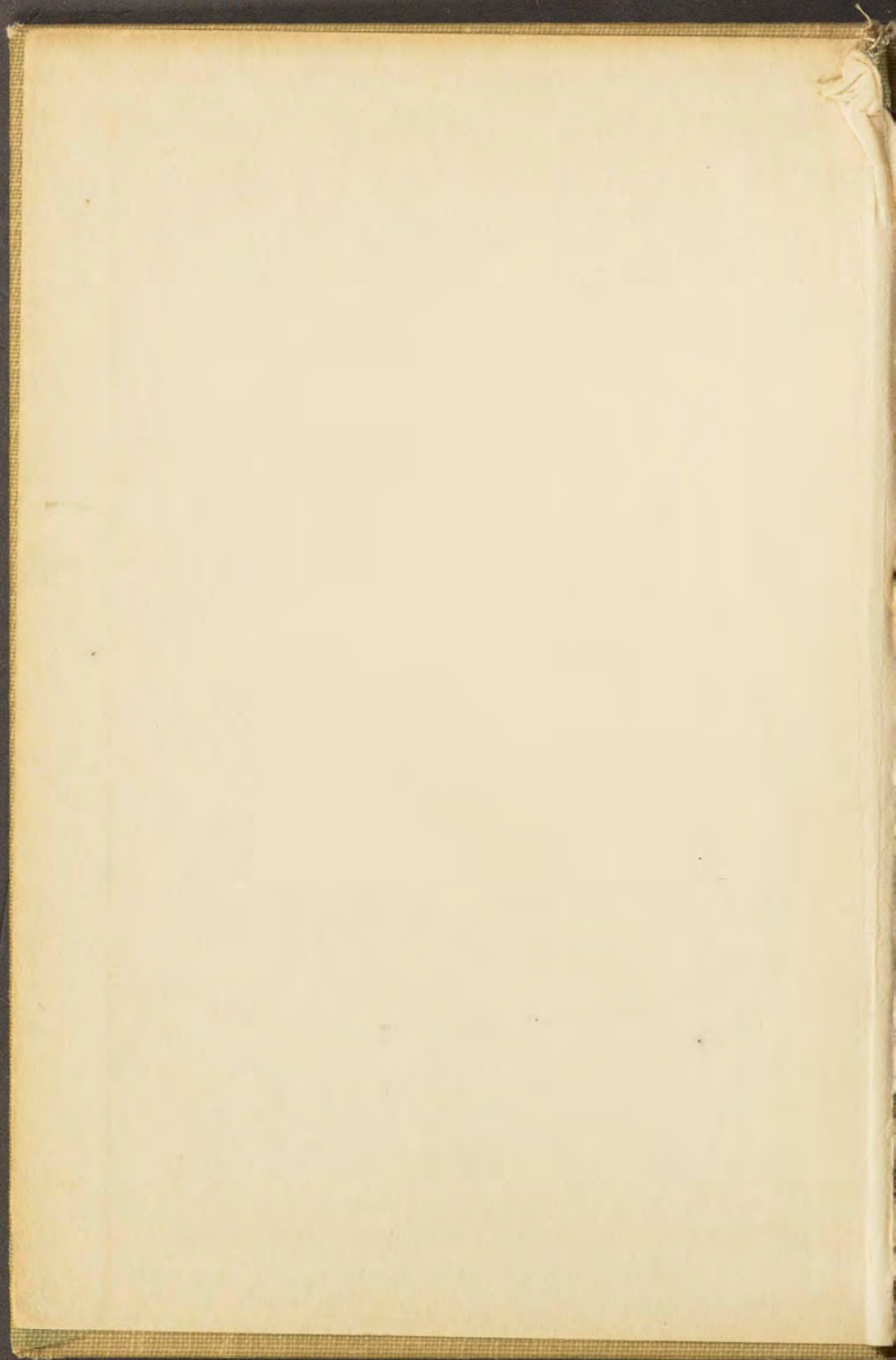
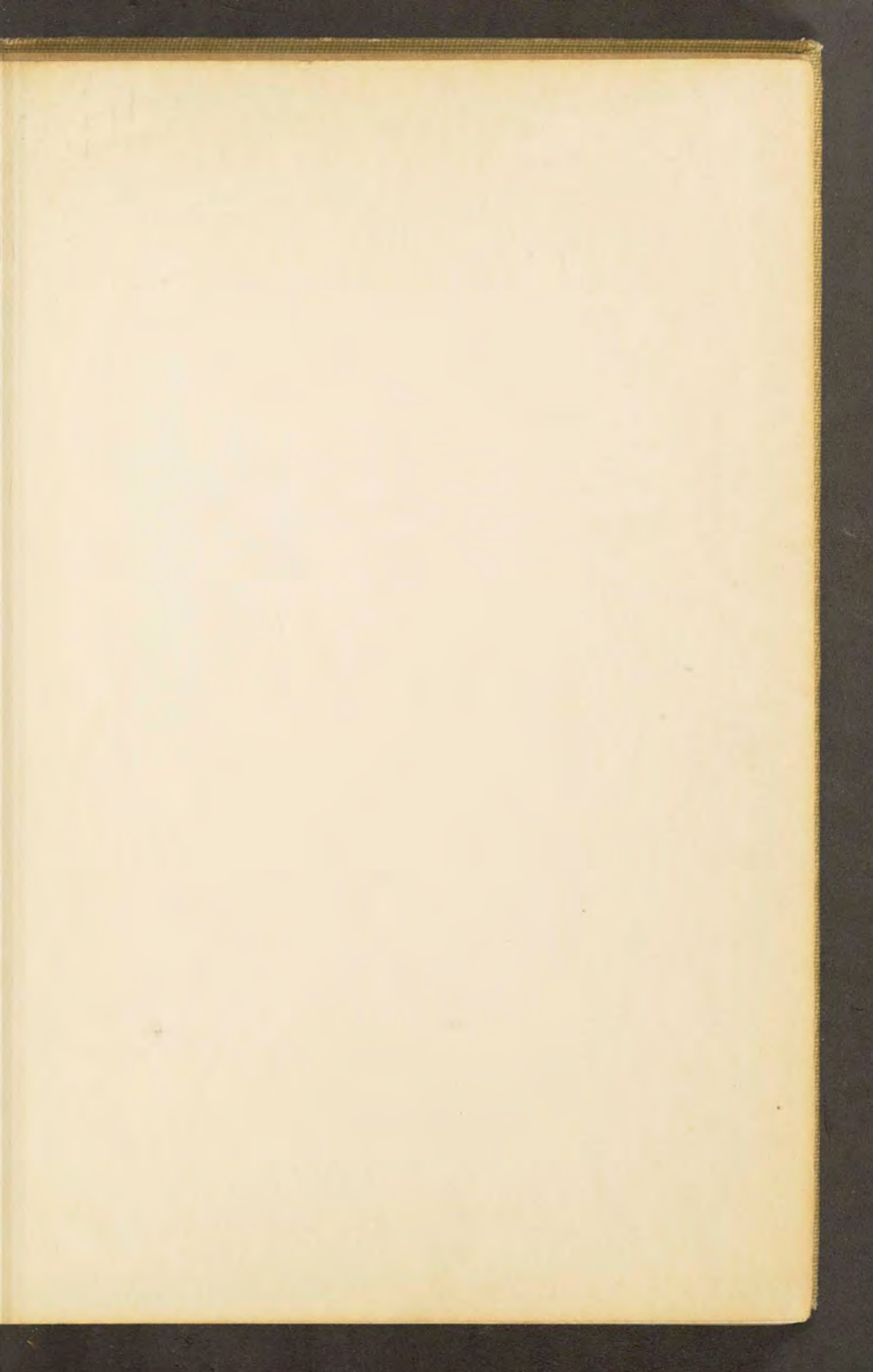


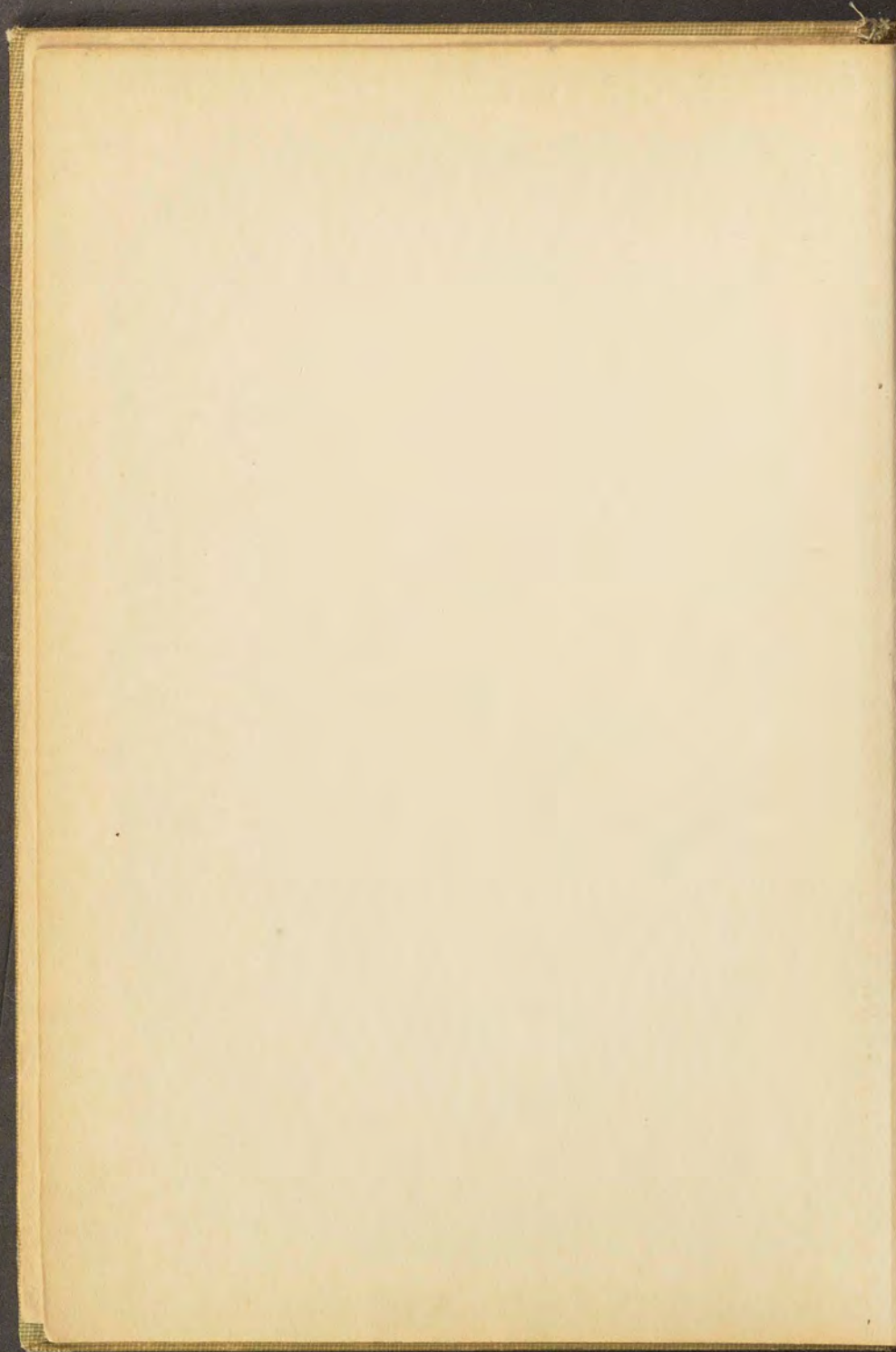
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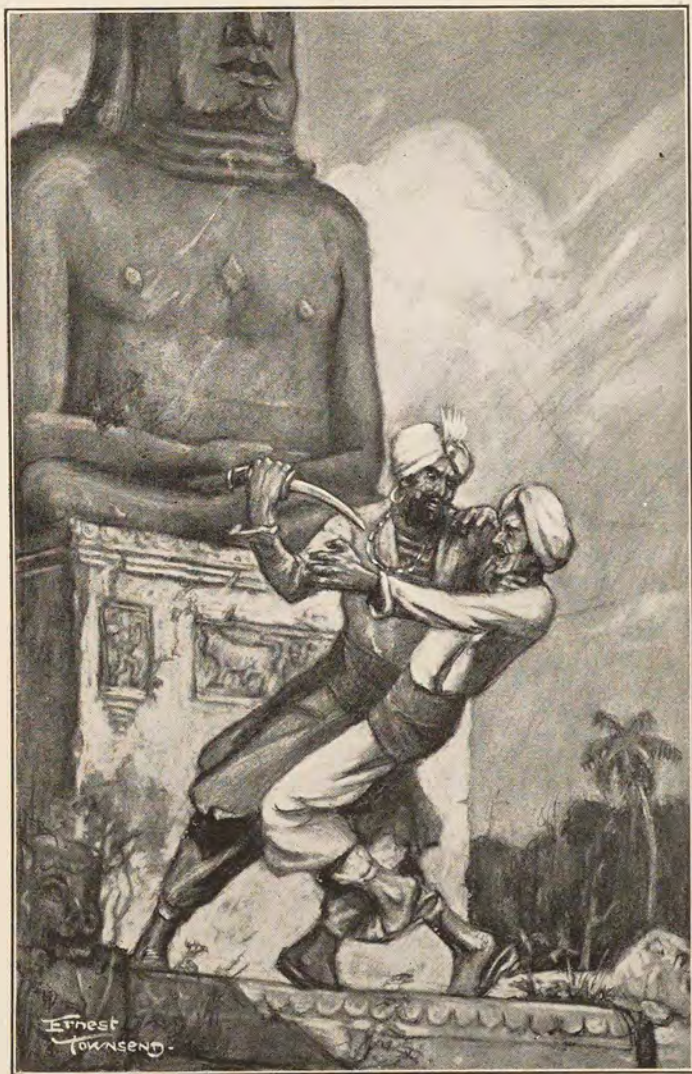
by
AMES
THOMPSON











TWO MEN WERE ENGAGED IN A DEADLY STRUGGLE.
"Adventure Boys and the Temple of Rubies" Page 176

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THE
ADVENTURE BOYS
AND THE
TEMPLE OF RUBIES

By
AMES THOMPSON

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

7101

THE JEWEL SERIES

By AMES THOMPSON

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Valley of Diamonds

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the River of Emeralds

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Lagoon of Pearls

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Temple of Rubies

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, New York

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE TEMPLE OF RUBIES

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE TEMPLE OF RUBIES

CHAPTER I

ASTIR ON THE RUBY TRAIL

"**A**RE you going to buy it, Ralph?" Jimmy Stone's low-pitched tones vibrated with incredulous curiosity. Edging closer to Ralph Edwards, his comrade, he added in a still lower tone, "Old Turban-top looks as though he belonged to the shark family."

"You've said it," Ralph muttered in return. He flashed Jimmy a brief side-long smile. "Betcha he does. Only he may not know rubies as well as Ralph does. The price he'll name for that peach may scare him. He'll never know he parted with a precious pippin at only a fair figure."

Ralph shot a mischievous glance toward the long, lean proprietor at the Oriental bazaar which the Adventure Boys had just invaded. "He's sure to offer me a bargain because I'll bet he doesn't know what a prize he really has. How about it, Oom Dad? Is Ralph right-o?"

This time Ralph addressed his father, standing at his left, a bronzed, resolute-faced man whose gray eyes were keenly bent upon the lean, turbaned proprietor of the picturesque East Indian bazaar. Malcolm Edwards was momen-

tarily more interested in the gaunt-faced owner of the little shop than in the trinket which the East Indian was displaying to the party of five men.

In the far-Eastern city of Calcutta there was perhaps no shop more typically Oriental than the curio shop of Ganga Singh. It was over-running with odd, curious and rare wares and warranted to challenge the eye and the money belt of the world wanderer who is prone to succumb to the lure of things Oriental.

"Hard to say," Malcolm Edwards returned in guarded fashion. "He seems to be of the inscrutable type of native. I'm not so sure he doesn't know the real value of the little temple. You had best——"

"You will do well to buy this temple, young Sahib." The gaunt-faced merchant broke in with cool impatience. His yellow-brown features had darkened at the low-toned exchange of words between Ralph and his father.

"Why will I do well to buy it?" challenged Ralph in his quick, direct fashion. "It's a sure enough hummer for gold and rubies! What else can you say for it?" Ralph's brown eyes were merry, though he kept a sober expression. He dearly loved to quiz the stiff-featured, cold-eyed native merchants with which the Adventure Boys were continually coming into contact since their arrival in Calcutta. They found the immobile-faced East Indians anxious to sell

their wares, but infinitely more anxious to get rid of their foreign customers as soon as a sale had been completed.

Ganga Singh had not exhibited either interest or satisfaction when the party of white-clad, white-helmeted travelers had come trooping into his shop. First glance about had shown the bazaar as deserted. Singh had stood reticently behind an oddly arranged pyramid of small Indian gods and idols, narrowly watching the newcomers. He had not even saluted them with a civil good-day when they had entered.

"Old Turban-top isn't dumb after all. That's nice," Bret Hartson murmured to Stanley Green in his waggish fashion. "I was afraid he might be."

"Never believe he is." A smile flickered briefly about Green's firm lips. The former sailor had been too long a world wanderer to be easily deceived. "He can't see us for a minute." Green's searching brown eyes were now resting speculatively upon the lean dark features of the East Indian.

"How much do you want for that temple?" Green nodded toward the beautiful jeweled curio as he spoke. The Hindoo had just taken it from a small show case where it had reposed among other expensive curios.

"The young sahib has already asked me a question," the Oriental evaded in excellent English. His strange yellow-brown eyes shifted

again from Green to Ralph. His manner toward Green had been tinged with insolence.

Green smiled at the snub, shrugging his broad shoulders. He opened his lips as though to repeat the question, then remained silent. The Oriental had again addressed Ralph.

"Young Sahib, the temple is the true shrine of Buddha. It has great value for this alone as well as for the rubies, which are pigeon-blood and set in gold." The Hindoo had now come from behind the rack of idols and was displaying the little ruby-set temple on the open palm of his right hand.

"At the true shrine of Buddha there are no jewels," Green corrected severely. "Buddha is humble and holy." He wished the brown man to understand that the Edwards party of travelers were not gullible.

"You know nothing about this temple, Sahib," Ganga Singh flashed back angrily. "This temple has been blessed by Buddha for a reason. It was old when Buddha himself was young. Besides the gold is pure and there are twenty-two rubies. What do *you* say, young Sahib?" He placed the temple in Ralph's eagerly extended right hand with a touch of reluctance.

"It's a pippin!" Ralph held up the trinket for his companions' approving admiration. "You haven't told me the price of it yet," he reminded the bazaar proprietor.

The faces of his companions reflected Ralph's impatience to learn the price of the little ruby temple. All knew it would be high. The Adventure Boys knew the treasure-hunting game. They had learned to estimate values in gold and gems.

"Three thousand pounds, young Sahib." The answer came in a tone of calm unconcern.

"*Good night!*" exploded Jimmy. "There's nothing cheap about that little keepsake. No, thanks; not for me." He jokingly waved off the idea of such an investment of money.

"Do you care if I buy it, Dad?" Ralph turned half hesitatingly to his father. "As a minor you'll have to back me. We can arrange the payment of the money at our bank to-morrow—unless this fellow doesn't wish to wait for his money until then. He may want to sell for spot cash, or else not at all." Ralph had now dropped into Spanish.

Having announced his price for the ruby temple the Oriental stood silently awaiting his customers' final word in the matter. His gaunt features presented a yellow-brown mask of stolid indifference as he waited.

"That brownie is used to first-class financial methods," Green said to Ralph in Spanish. "Only you will have to show him the check for the three thousand pounds before he will hand over the temple to you. These Hindoo merchants usually follow English commercial

methods rather closely. I daresay this Hindoo has customers scattered all over Europe. His bazaar is pretty high class, you know. He certainly wants a smashing price for the temple. How about it, Oom Bossy Edwards? Do the rubies warrant it?"

Malcolm Edwards was now holding the beautiful little gold temple in his left hand, examining it minutely. He turned the trinket this way, then that. The light of the warm afternoon sun shone through a window of the bazaar, catching the rubies and making them sparkle with wonderful rainbow flashes.

Stanley Green had been a jewel hunter only two years. He had forsaken the sea to enlist in Malcolm Edwards's loyal little group of jewel hunters. Mr. Edwards and his son Ralph, however, had been jewel prospectors since Ralph's early boyhood. Ralph was almost twenty now, with several years of stirring experience in digging for "shiners" to his credit. He was a "natural" jewel hunter. His father was secretly very proud also of his son's unusual ability to appraise jewels, polished or in the rough.

Readers of the "Adventure Boys and the Valley of Diamonds" have already recognized Malcolm Edwards and his son Ralph and their three comrades as the band of intrepid adventurers who made a sturdy hunt across the perilous South African veldt in search of the hoped-for Valley of Diamonds.

Later, their adventures in Peru, while on the trail of emeralds, were set down in "The Adventure Boys and the River of Emeralds." Enriched beyond their fondest hopes by their successful prospecting in diamonds and emeralds, the Adventure Boys invested some of their wealth in a fast sea-going yacht which the congenial joint owners named the *Swallow*. With the *Swallow's* nose turned toward the South Seas, a hunting ground of stirring adventure, the yachtsmen found themselves looking eagerly forward to pearl gathering. Malcolm Edwards was desirous of visiting an old friend, the Reverend Richard Sanford, a missionary on the island of Guadalcanar, a cannibal island of the Solomon group. The adventures of the *Swallow's* crew, before their anchorage at Guadalcanar, and during their stay on the island, have been already recorded in "The Adventure Boys and the Lagoon of Pearls.

Six months had passed since the *Swallow* had brought her lively crew from the sunlit shores of the tropics to London and Paris with their precious store of pearls. They had disposed of their pearl findings at exceptionally good prices. They were therefore content to be at leisure for a while, enjoying the comforts of modern civilization until such time when the spirit moved them to seek the adventure road again. Of late they had begun to tire of what Stanley Green styled "the soft life."

It was Jimmy Stone who set the adventure ball rolling again one evening as the adventurers sat talking together in the lounge of a London hotel. What he had said was: "The straightest dope I know is that rubies are mighty scarce. What?"

"Yes; what?" Ralph had repeated, mimicking Jimmy's tone. "Let's make 'em more plentiful. How about it, Bossy Edwards?" He had laughingly appealed to his father.

"Go as far as you like," Malcolm Edwards had indulgently responded. "I've been expecting to hear you boys say it was time to be on the move again."

"Hurray! Let's start on the ruby trail in the morning!" Ralph proposed joyfully.

His comrades shared his jubilation at the words they had been secretly longing to hear. There had been nothing to prevent the carrying out of the proposal. Next morning an early train had sped the adventurers to Liverpool, where their yacht was in dry dock. Within three days she had put to sea again, bound for the city of Calcutta, India.

Calcutta, however, was to be only a first stop. It would be a stepping-off place to their ultimate destination. It was toward Burma that Malcolm Edwards was now turning figurative eyes. He had heard enough of Upper Burma as a ruby country to set him to considering it as a prospect for him and his little group of

jewel hunters. He had a strong conviction that, beyond the snake and tiger-infested jungles far north of Mandalay, the wonder city of Burma, the hill country contained ruby-bearing sand.

The Adventure Boys had been in Calcutta for almost a month, staying at the Arlington, an exclusive apartment hotel. They had tied up their yacht, the *Swallow*, in an estuary of the Ganges River and had gone ashore, there to mingle with the East Indian populace, hoping to become more rapidly conversant in the East Indian tongue and more familiar with Oriental manners and customs.

Eventually they expected to take to the yacht again and sail for Burma, landing at Rangoon, a populous city situated on an estuary of the Irrawaddy River. At Rangoon the travelers intended to dry-dock the *Swallow* and proceed up the river by steamer to Mandalay. At Mandalay Malcolm Edwards purposed to look around a little before proceeding farther north. He had decided that this time he would break into the jungle with as light packs as he could carry, and yet not leave out anything necessary to the well-being and comfort of the expedition.

He still lacked a guide. He was determined his guide should be a native. Thus far he had neither seen nor talked with a native whom he thought might measure up to the critical standard he had set. Nor did he intend to start on an expedition, which could not fail to be peril-

ous, without a guide. He was not familiar enough with the topography of India to insure safety in the blazing of his own trail, unaided by native resource and wisdom.

"It is well worth the figure he asks for it," Malcolm Edwards now replied to his son's half anxious question in Spanish, a language which the Adventure Boys often used when conversing confidentially. "More than three thousand pounds, I believe. It is a rare prize. Those two rubies that form the temple doors are marvels of beauty. Neither of them is less than from eight to ten carats in weight. They don't show their real depth on account of the way they are placed in the temple. I'll buy it for you, Ralph, if you like. I hardly ever give you a present." He smiled indulgently at his son.

"A thousand thanks, Dad. That's bully of you to offer me a present like that." Ralph indicated the ruby with a little nod of the head, looking his youthful appreciation of his father's indulgence. "But please let me buy it. I can see where Ralph will have a whole lot of fun with this doo-dad. Watch me go parading down among the London and Paris jewel dealers with that bunch of pidgy-blood shiners. I'll give 'em a chance to bid on it and get 'em going, then I'll pass the word that it's not for sale."

Ralph had set the temple down on the show case directly in front of Ganga Singh. As he continued to reel off rapid Spanish to his com-

panions the bazaar owner continued to watch him in moody silence. His glum expression appeared to deepen at Ralph's flow of words in a tongue unknown to him. Twice he leaned forward as though to break into Ralph's impetuous flood of Spanish. Twice he checked the impulse and remained a brown silent image.

The absorbed group of prospectors gathered about the case on which stood the wonderful little temple failed to note the entrance into the bazaar of a tall man in the customary white of the tropics. He had eyes for only the temple. A deep scowl corrugated his bronzed forehead. He forged across the room in two or three long strides and straight into the midst of the group gathered around the East Indian.

"Is that temple for sale? What price?" he demanded excitedly. He appeared not to see the jewel hunters. His attention was wholly fixed upon the ruby temple.

"Sahib, the temple has been bought by the young Sahib here." The bazaar owner's tones were coldly indifferent, but a dull, angry spark burned in his pale brown eyes. He gave a stiff nod toward Ralph. "You have——"

"You must have had it on hand all the time yesterday when I was trying to describe it to you," the Englishman angrily accused the East Indian. "It wasn't the first time I'd told you about that temple, either. You've known for months that I was on the lookout for it.

You could have given me a chance yesterday to buy it."

"I know nothing about what you speak, Englishman," Ganga Singh retorted with icy dignity.

"Oh, I say! What a whopper!" The angry tide of red deepened in the Englishman's good-looking face. "What's the reason you cut me out of bidding for it?"

"I know nothing of what you speak," stubbornly maintained the native. "Only last night late a friend brought me the temple. It belonged to his sister's husband who was once rich, but became poor and had to sell it."

"You're another, and like the rest of your kind. You thought you'd get more out of an American for the temple than from me. You made a mistake. I heard you name your price. Get this straight. I'd have given you more than three thousand pounds for it. I've a suspicion that you didn't want me to have it. If you didn't, then, *why* didn't you? *That's* what I'm going to make it my business to find out. When I do, and I shall—look out. Watch your step."

The young Englishman shook an angry hand at the bazaar keeper. His voice vibrated with indignation. Casting a last furiously angry glance at the Hindoo he swung sharply away from the silent group of listeners and hurried from the bazaar, leaving a not unsympathetic audience behind him.

CHAPTER II

SCENTING A MYSTERY

FIREWORKS. Rip, bang, whoop! Just like that!" Bret broke the brief silence which had ensued as the angry Englishman strode out of the bazaar.

"See here," Ralph turned energetically to Ganga Singh: "did you promise this Englishman first chance on the temple? I want to play fairly. He seems to want the temple pretty badly. And he seems to have a real reason for wanting it, too."

"No, no, young Sahib. The temple is for *you*," Ganga Singh persisted. "The Inglese are very hot of temper. This one was only boasting when he said he would pay more for the temple. This is not the temple he had already described to me. The one he hopes to find was never made, I believe. He hurried away when he found he could gain nothing." The Hindoo made a gesture of contempt. Nevertheless, he cast an oddly uneasy glance at the closed portières behind him.

"What do you say, Dad? What did you think about the English fellow?" Ralph appealed to his father.

"A high-class Englishman, I should say. Since he didn't press his claim, I should consider the temple yours," Malcolm Edwards said judicially. "Come now. We must arrange with Ganga Singh for the payment and delivery of the temple. It's after five o'clock and I am ready for dinner so far as an appetite is concerned."

The matter of payment for Ralph's costly purchase having been quickly arranged to the East Indian's satisfaction, the party of adventurers found the street again.

They had hardly left the bazaar when Stanley Green burst out in low emphatic tones: "Blame take it! I felt sorry for that big Englishman. I got him as straight as a string. Not so Ganga Singh. He's some smooth old boy. I'll say the Englishman bawled Ganga out properly."

"He seemed like a regular fellow," Ralph agreed, looking slightly worried. "If the spiffy little temple had a thousand rubies instead of twenty-two, I'd not care to have it as the price of a mean trick."

"I'd like to hear the Englishman's side of things," Green said thoughtfully. "We may run across him in the streets or the hotel while we are here."

"Why, there he is now!" cried Bret Hartson, his eyes happening to pick up a familiar, white-clad figure striding along in the middle of the

street a short distance ahead of the Edwards's party.

Almost immediately after Bret's announcement the Englishman turned and began looking backward. He scanned the numbers of pedestrians in the street with a searching glance. His gaze coming to rest upon the adventurers, he wheeled and came rapidly back to meet them.

"He's spotted us and is on our trail," said Green as the stranger came nearer. "Glad of it. Now we'll know what it's all about."

"I hope the confounded temple isn't an heirloom," Ralph grumbled, then laughed. "I'd hate to keep a treasure like that away from him."

The Englishman had now come up with the group and was saying in a frank, manly fashion: "Pardon me, I wonder if you men would mind coming to see me to-night at this address?" He took in the four younger men at one quick glance, but his eyes came to rest inquiringly upon Malcolm Edwards. He had already taken an engraved calling card from a coat pocket and was holding it out to Edwards. Below the engraving on the card an address had been lightly penciled.

"My methods may seem rather cheeky to you. Please regard me as having nothing but the best of intentions in mind," the big stranger continued with a half apologetic inflection.

"When I saw you this afternoon in old Ganga Singh's bazaar I decided to try and have a word with you later. You are staying at the Arlington Hotel, aren't you? I saw your crowd sitting in the lounge late the other evening and took you to be guests there."

"Yes, we are staying at the Arlington," Malcolm Edwards replied.

"I'd ask your permission to call on you at the Arlington," the Englishman immediately declared, "but it wouldn't do at all. You see I have a story to tell you about the temple," he nodded at Ralph, "that you bought of Ganga this afternoon. I'd not dare to do any private talking to you at the Arlington. Too many cozy little nooks there just large enough to hold listeners-in. At the Beresford it's different. It's a private apartment hotel. My sister Margaret and I have an apartment there."

The Englishman's tone had grown more appealingly eager as he spoke. He seemed anxious to impress his hearers favorably.

"Count me in for a talk about the ruby temple, Mr. Farley," Ralph interposed briskly. "I'll say you know a whole lot more about it than I know—maybe more than old Ganga knows. I tried to quiz him about the temple after you left. I wasn't satisfied with the tale he told us about it. He said the temple I bought wasn't the one you were hunting for; that it didn't answer the description you had given him

of a temple. You hadn't stayed to press your claim, so I went ahead and bought it of him. I'm to have it delivered to me to-morrow after old Sharkface gets his check at the bank we are using while in Calcutta."

"You're in luck. That's the best I can say. There's only one temple like the ruby one you bought to-day—and you've got it." Farley gave a little rueful laugh. There was a brief interval of silence. "You—I suppose you'd not care to consider a good offer for it," he suddenly said. "I'd be willing to give you double what you are going to pay for it."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Farley, but it isn't a question of money with me specially. I can afford to pay your price for it, but I'd rather not sell it. I'm going to have some fun with it in London among the jewel dealers. I'm going to get them all stirred up about that little old temple," Ralph ended with a mischievous gesture.

"Don't do such a risky thing! Not unless you are tired of living!" Patent alarm flashed into the Englishman's steady gray eyes. "You'd have the London jewel thieves to fight, and they're cruel hawks. You don't know what I know about the temple. But you will know to-night. Then you'll understand why it means so much to me, more than it can mean to any one else except my sister. She feels the same as I about it. May I expect you at the Beresford this evening? Our Apartment is 'D', second

floor." There was a new note of appeal in his deep voice.

Unconsciously the group of jewel hunters had moved a little to one side of the wide walk. They surrounded the man who had just accosted them, signally interested in his remarks concerning the little temple which Ralph had arranged to purchase from Ganga Singh.

"I must hurry on. I'd prefer our meeting here to escape notice. It would be better for you. Thank you." He accepted the card Malcolm Edwards now handed him with a pleased nod. "Then I may expect you, to-night?" he repeated.

"Yes, we shall be pleased to call," the jewel man returned.

"You will be doing me an inestimable favor by coming, Mr. Edwards. I must warn you, you are likely to be shadowed, coming or going to see me. Keep a lively lookout. I'll explain all to-night." He half turned away.

"Woof!" Ralph exclaimed. "Who's afraid? We're five strong and have seen some spiffy scraps. Nobody yet has got away with anything he has tried to put over us." He spoke with the carelessness of victory.

"I knew you fellows were the right sort the night I saw you in the Arlington. When I saw you in the bazaar I made up my mind to try to meet you," their new acquaintance said with hurried enthusiasm. "Good-by until eight

to-night. You'll understand everything then." He suddenly left them and headed for a cross street which stretched just ahead of where they had been standing. He plunged into the crowd which thronged it and was soon lost to view.

"He didn't bother to wait and be introduced to us," Bret said lightly. "Time enough for that to-night. What? He was certainly in an awful rush. He had lots on his mind besides his helmet."

"He's an all-around good chap, I believe," was Jimmy's thoughtful opinion.

"He's a toppo fellow; that's my guess," Ralph said with sudden confidence in the now vanished Englishman. "What's your opinion of him, Oom Dad? I know it's good, or we wouldn't be going over to the Beresford to-night. Just how good is it?"

"Good enough to hear his story to-night and help him in any way I can," was Malcolm Edwards's firm rejoinder.

"Hurra for Oom Bossy Edwards!" Ralph waved an acclaiming arm. "Say, Dad, that Englishman is all fussed up about my buying the temple. We seem to have walked right into the middle of a mystery—the mystery of why Ganga Singh wouldn't sell this fellow the temple."

"Suppose after you have heard this big guy's story you feel that you ought to let him have the temple. Would you sell it to him for just what

you paid for it, even though he's offered you double the price for it?" Jimmy propounded with owl-like wisdom.

"If I got to the point where I grew generous enough to think this Farley had a better claim upon the ruby temple than I, I'd probably let him have it for just what I paid for it. What class robber do you think I am, James? Boy, don't you know I have scads of money?" Ralph threw Jimmy a glance of mock reproach. "I don't need to rob anybody."

"Ain't it the truth?" Jimmy pretended to be abashed.

"Now you're coming to your senses," Ralph encouraged with a wide smile. Almost instantly the smile was replaced by sudden seriousness. "What's the use in saying a word about what I'd do until I get the real dope tonight from Farley. It all depends on how good a reason he has for wanting the temple and how hard he wants it. If he wants it worse than I do, maybe he'll get it—maybe not." His boyish grin again came into cheerful evidence. "I think well of that little ruby patch myself. His claim to it will have to be a rip-snorter, and don't you forget to remember it."

CHAPTER III

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE FARLEYS

IT was a little past seven o'clock that evening when the Adventure Boys left their hotel to stroll through the teeming streets of Calcutta on their way to the Beresford, the apartment hotel in which the Englishman, Arthur Farley, and his sister resided. Throngs of dark-skinned Asiatics and Eurasians surged along the streets. Queer carts, and rickshaws, drawn by natives, occasional elephants carrying passengers on their broad backs, bullock carts and other East Indian vehicles plodded their placid course. In and out among them slipped hurrying taxicabs, giving an ultra modern tone to the picturesque native ensemble.

The adventurers had preferred walking to the Beresford in the warm sunset light rather than use a taxicab. The day had not been very hot for that torrid climate and a cool breeze had sprung up which made walking agreeable. They went directly from the dining room after dinner to the street. Stanley Green knew the precise location of the Beresford Hotel. Following his lead the five friends strolled along the colorful thoroughfares of the great Oriental city, pleas-

antly interested in all they glimpsed of life in the far East.

It was less than a mile to the Beresford. The apartment hotel was located in what the jewel hunters immediately guessed to be a high-class residential section of the city.

"Strictly English, is my opinion," Green was staring contemplatively up at the tall ornamental stone houses which lined both sides of a broad palm-shaded avenue into which they had just turned. "Yes, and over there is the Beresford." He nodded toward a four-story building across the street, set back within a walled, green compound. It was of grayish stone and had tall pillared verandas at the front and left side. On the right side was a porte-cochère. There were colorful tropical flowers in beds on the lawn and the verandas were flanked with graceful palms and blooming tropical plants.

"Some class!" Bret's curly head wagged approval of the Beresford. "I shouldn't mind living there myself."

"Well, why don't you?" teased Jimmy.

"Don't ask me that, Boy!" Bret put up a protesting hand. "Haven't I got a date with a ruby mine?"

"Betcha you have, and so have the rest of this gang," Jimmy made buoyant reply.

"Have we?" Ralph laughed. "I've got to dig up the price of my ruby temple. I'm going to make rubies pay for rubies."

"Suppose you should sell the temple to the English fellow to-night?" Bret propounded curiously. "Do you have any idea that you may do it?"

"I don't know." A frown of indecision clouded Ralph's dark brows. "You and Jimmy are certainly trying to third-degree me about selling that temple," he added with a laugh. "The more I think about selling it the less I feel like doing it."

There was time for no more talk. The party had now reached the Beresford and were being admitted at the street gate of the compound by a turbaned, uniformed gate-keeper. Mention of Farley's name caused him to open the gate to the adventurers with a low bow. Very politely the native directed the party up the wide central walk. At the door another uniformed native met them with a broad smile and obeisance. With him was a tall handsome young native, of a pale brown color with flashing dark eyes and straight, well-cut features.

"You are the Sahib Edwards?" he inquired of Malcolm Edwards in a low pleasant voice.

"Yes," Edwards replied in his business-like tones.

"I am Chuma, the body servant of his excellency, the Sahib Arthur. He has sent me to bring you and your friends to his apartment." Thus the good-looking native introduced him-

self. Dressed in a white pongee suit he looked rather more like a young Peruvian than an Oriental.

"We are glad to know you, Chuma." Edwards extended his hand to the young native in the kindly democratic manner that won him friends wherever he chanced to go.

Chuma clasped the extended fingers, then shook hands with the four younger men, the light of pleased surprise in his great dark eyes.

"I thank you, Heaven-born," he said simply. "I will show you to my master's apartment."

The callers followed their guide through a large, attractively furnished lounge to an elevator, situated at the back of the big room. The cage stopped for them at the second floor. They followed Chuma down a short, broad corridor. He paused before a door on their right marked "D", the letter of Farley's apartment. He had hardly touched a light hand to one of the door panels when the door opened and Arthur Farley stood framed in the doorway, a genial smile on his handsome English features.

"Prompt to the minute and to your word!" he exclaimed in low pleased tones. "But I knew you would be. Come in; come in."

The Englishman ushered his guests into a small reception room, simply but expensively furnished. They crossed the little room and were then conducted into a large and very charming living room, where Margaret Far-

ley, the Englishman's sister, had already risen from her chair to greet them.

"This is my sister, Margaret, Mr. Edwards. Margaret, this is the gentleman I met at Ganga Singh's to-day. I mean, one of them. I'll ask you to introduce your pals to my sister. I am not sure of their names as yet. I only know I've met the right sort of fellows," Farley ended, turning with a genial smile to Malcolm Edwards.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Edwards." Margaret Farley's gracious courtesy instantly won the approval of the Adventure Boys. She was a tall, slender young woman with curly bronze-gold hair and big blue eyes. She shook hands cordially with Malcolm Edwards, then with each of the boys in turn as Edwards presented them to her and her brother.

"Please feel at home here," she said heartily. "Arthur and I have been looking forward to your call. We are both interested in what he has to tell you to-night. That is all I have to say about the story of the ruby temple. He can tell it better than I."

Presently the exchange of pleasantries attending the adventurers' introduction to the Farleys was over and their host had requested his guests to draw up their chairs in a semi-circle. His own chair he placed within the space left open by the forming of the curve, saying significantly: "Nothing like making assurance

doubly sure. Strange things happen—here in India—some of them past explanation. A chap sometimes almost comes to believe in magic.”

“Master, there is no one outside the door, or in the corridor.” Chuma, who had slipped shadow-like from the room, made a sudden noiseless entrance.

“Think any one is watching this apartment, Chuma?” Farley made concerned inquiry.

“No, not now. Perhaps some one may try to watch, later. But no one can come near and I not know it.” Chuma spoke with an air of calm certainty.

“Chuma’s jungle training makes him invaluable as a scout,” Farley said warmly. “I warned you that you might be shadowed on your way here. Do you believe you were?”

“I can’t say. We may have been.” Malcolm Edwards glanced inquiringly at Green. The sailor rarely let anything “get by” him.

“I have an idea we were trailed here,” Green said. “I kept a lookout all the way, and didn’t catch a single suspicious move from a brownie. Still I had a curious conviction that there were trailers in the offing.”

“Some of Ganga’s pals may have seen us talking together in the street this afternoon,” returned Farley. “You see, Singh has a bad reputation. He is considerably older than he looks to be. They say here in Calcutta that he is a friend to dacoits. It has been said that

some of the best stuff he has shown in his bazaar was loot, brought him for sale by dacoits."

"Weren't the dacoits, supposedly, stamped out quite a long while ago?" Ralph wanted to know. "I thought the kibosh had been put on 'em by the government troops."

Farley smiled. "There are none left, supposedly, but don't swallow such yarns. The real variety is still skulking about in Calcutta. Their sons have mostly inherited their cut-throat tendencies. It will pay you to keep your eyes open when you are going about the city. It's a great old human dumping ground and hard-boiled fellows of all nationalities drift in here from world-wide ports."

"We're anxious to clear soon," Mr. Edwards declared. "Our yacht is tied up out there." He motioned toward the river. "We're going soon to sail for Rangoon, dry-dock our boat there for a while and take a river boat up to Mandalay. From there we will probably go north; perhaps as far north as the Chinese border."

Malcolm Edwards was more than half inclined to give the Farleys further particulars of the prospecting expedition for rubies which he and his flock were planning to make. Caution prompted him to discreet silence. He wished first to hear the Englishman's story.

"*You are going to Upper Burma?*" Farley's

voice had risen to a tone of delighted interrogation. "Oh, that is great news! What do you think of *that*, Peggy girl?" He smiled radiance at his sister Margaret.

"It's simply bully." Margaret Farley seemed even more delighted than her brother. "Oh!" she exclaimed in the next breath in an embarrassed tone. The pink color flooded her fair face. "I forgot that you've only just met my brother. You know Arthur is determined to go north to the border. I can't bear to have him and Chuma go so far north, alone. How I wish he might go with you Americans, at least part of the journey. He would never even dream of asking such a great favor of you. But I would, because I am his sister and his only living relative now. Is it strange that I shouldn't be afraid to ask you to let him join your party?"

"You're a good sport, Miss Farley. Oh—er—I mean you are splendid." Ralph reddened, then laughed as he stammered out his correction.

"Thank you." Peggy Farley broke into a merry little laugh. "That's the highest compliment you could pay me. You will know more about Arthur and me after you have heard Arthur's story of the ruby temple. Please begin now, Arthur," she appealed prettily to her brother. "Tell Mr. Edwards and his friends as much as you know about the Temple of Light."

CHAPTER IV

THE STORY OF THE VANISHED CONVOY

“ALL right, Peggy.” Arthur Farley threw an affectionate glance toward his charming sister. Her blue eyes were bent proudly upon him. Leaning forward in his chair, fingers lightly clasped together, he began in low, animated tones:

“As Peggy has just said ‘The Temple of Light’ is the name of the trinket you bought of Ganga Singh. It is as old as the hills, according to the word of the oldest, most dried up yogis in India. There’s not another talisman in the world to-day that can touch it for rare individuality.”

“Ganga Singh said something about the temple being old when Buddha was in his youth. The old-timer who started that story certainly couldn’t have had anything on Buddha,” Bret commented with his jolly giggle. “Oh, Gee! Excuse me, Mr. Farley. Won’t some of you fellows choke off that Bret Hartson? He talks too much. Only watch out how you come at me,” he warned, glimpsing too-ready acceptance of his request in his chums’ eyes.

“You are certainly excused. You have told

me something specially interesting to me about Ganga Singh's guff. Of course he has invented plenty of fairy tales about the temple. I'll venture to say he hasn't had it long in his possession. I can easily guess how he came by it." Farley lifted broad shoulders in a knowing shrug.

"You mean he obtained it from a dacoit?" Mr. Edwards said quickly.

The Englishman nodded. "It was stolen from my grandfather, General Wynne Farley, twenty years ago by dacoits when he was near the Chinese border of Upper Burma. At the time it was stolen he was sixty years old, but as rugged and strong as a man twenty years younger might be. Grandy, as I called him, went up there to prospect for rubies. Three other Englishmen went with him. Grandy was a real adventurer. He had served England faithfully as a young English officer and had won the rank of general for bravery and distinguished conduct in quelling dacoit uprisings. Grandy found rubies and he and his three comrades staked their claims and made a hurried trip to Mandalay in order to have the claims properly recognized and recorded.

"They left Mandalay as soon as they could and went north again to their ruby prospect. It was a long journey. They made it part of the way on the Irrawaddy River in a river boat, then left the river and plunged into the jungle,

trekking due north. Their prospect was back in the hills and promised to be a rich one," Farley continued. "They had found plenty of byon. That is ruby-bearing sand.

"All this happened when I was only a few months old. Grandy was prospecting in the hills for almost eight years. My father was Grandy's only son. He was in the English diplomatic service and we lived in Grandy's big house at Mandalay. I had never seen Grandy until he came from the hills to visit us when I was eight years old. I was crazy about him and followed him about like a shadow. My eighth birthday came while he was with us. He played games with Peggy and me and we had a fine time in the morning of that day. In the afternoon he told me he wanted me to come to his room because he had something beautiful to show me. He didn't ask Peggy to come, but she didn't mind. As soon as I stepped into his room he closed and locked the door. I remember I said, 'Why for do you lock the door? Our wallahs (servants) never open the doors. They only knock and wait for us to open them.' He shook his head at me and said he wouldn't risk leaving the door unlocked just then. He went to the windows and looked out to see if any one was walking about the compound. Then he unfastened a broad black leather belt that he wore around his waist under his coat. He showed me a pocket cut on the inside of the

belt. It was buttoned down with a black leather flap. He opened it, and took out the Temple of Light."

"You mean the very one—" Bret began excitedly.

"Yes, the same temple you saw yesterday. The same temple Mr. Edwards bought of Singh," Farley said. "Grandy set it on a small teakwood table. There was nothing else on the table, and the rubies in it glowed and sparkled wonderfully against the dark wood. Grandy told me then that when he died he wished me to have the ruby temple; that I must never part with it. I must promise that I would regard it always as my greatest treasure. He gave me a ring to seal the promise. This is it."

Farley stretched forth a strong, lean hand. On the little finger was a narrow band of gold set with one magnificent oval-cut ruby. The gorgeous stone weighed in the neighborhood of nine or ten carats and was notable for its rich red color.

The Englishman slipped the ring from his finger and handed it to Ralph, who received it with interested alacrity. The ring was then passed from one of the jewel men to another, until it had gone the round of the little company. Each and all the adventurers had noticed the ruby ring on Farley's finger and had secretly wondered whether it had come from Upper Burma.

"A fine specimen of a pigeon-blood ruby," declared Malcolm Edwards as he returned the ring to its owner. "But you've only told us half the story," he added, smiling.

"This is the other half, from where I left off. You see, Grandy and his three pals struck a regular bonanza of rubies. They mined for the crimson sparklers steadily for eight years. They kept their stones in a steel strong box, and kept the box hidden in a place in the rocks. Grandy finally decided to come down to Mandalay and arrange to take back with him three or four soldiers from the nearest barracks to act as an escort to the four men when they should bring down their ruby convoy. He also intended to load up with new guns and revolvers so that he and his pals wouldn't be caught unarmed if a straying band of dacoits was to come down on them while they were bringing their strong box to Mandalay.

"He was on this business when I saw him and he showed me the temple and gave me the ring. He had come all the way from the border with only his man, Gulo, for company. He was a wonder, and brave— He didn't know the word fear. He knew the jungle, and how to brace it and win out against it. He was a jewel man, too. He had hunted diamonds in the Guianas, and sapphires in Ceylon."

Farley paused with an audibly regretful sigh. "He started back to the border not long

after my birthday, and I never saw him again. He showed me the temple several times before he went away, but he would not say from whence it came, or how he happened to have it. I recall having once asked him who gave it to him and having been told severely that I must never ask him that particular question again. He would not tell either my father or mother how he came by it. He usually wore the leather belt which contained it, strapped about his waist under his clothing. He had expected to make the journey to, and from, the ruby prospect in about three months, going partly by river and the rest of the way either pony or elephant back. It was eight months before we had any word of him. Then a German naturalist named Karl Heinrich brought my parents bad news. Grandy was dead. Two native boys working for Heinrich, whose business was the trapping of wild animals for zoos and menageries, had discovered Grandy, lying face downward in a jungle thicket, with a dah stuck through his back between the shoulders."

"What's a dah?" Jimmy asked. "Some sort of Burmese stabber is my guess."

"It's a wicked affair; strictly Burmese. It's a broad steel knife, sharpened to a razor edge on both sides and just flexible enough to do terrible damage in slashing or lunging," Farley explained. "The dah missed Grandy's heart but pierced his lungs. The dacoit who struck

such a coward's blow left him for dead. He didn't die, though, for three days after the two brown boys carried him to Heinrich's house. It took them two days to carry him there, too, for they had been trekking quite a long way from Heinrich's place, trying to lasso a big python they'd been on the trail of for a week.

"He was unconscious until after the boys had turned him over to Heinrich, then he rallied a little and spoke. He couldn't talk much. He was too weak. Still he managed to tell Heinrich that he and his pals and their men were on the way from the ruby sands with a strong box full of rubies. They had picked up a Hindoo, stabbed in a dozen places and in a dying condition. They had tried to make the wounded brown man a little more comfortable. He showed his gratitude for their ministering by warning Grandy that a band of dacoits was lying in wait for the convoy at a certain point in the hills about a day's journey from the place where they then were. The dacoits believed the prospectors had mined a rich treasure of rubies and had been spying upon the four Englishmen for a long while. The Hindoo and two other dacoits had been trailing the convoy, intending to go on ahead of it that night and report to the larger body of dacoits that the convoy was coming. But the three had quarreled over a big ruby that the Hindoo had found. His companions had stabbed him,

stolen the ruby from him and left him for dead on the trail. He advised my grandfather to hide the strong box of rubies somewhere in the hills and strike out for the nearest military station through the jungle. They were then almost down to the foothills. He told Grandy that he would do wisely to ask for a detachment of soldiers from the fort to see the rubies safely into Mandalay."

"Gee whiz, but doesn't real adventure put it all over adventure yarns!" Bret cried out wonderingly.

"Yes, if a fellow is a jewel hunter," Stanley Green amended, smiling.

"You are right," Farley nodded concurrence. "It's the lure of finding gold and jewels that urges men on to the wildest sort of adventure."

"What did your grandfather do?" Hal was impatient to hear more of the story. "Didn't I understand you to say that he had taken some soldiers from the fort near Mandalay up into the hills with him?"

"Yes, he had four soldiers, the pick of their detachment, with him; his man, Gulo, and four wallahs, brown men, and good fighters. Thirteen men in the outfit, but none of them was superstitious about 'thirteen.' Grandy was very hard-headed. He decided to follow the jungle trail, which he knew, rather than try to cut a new one through it to Fort Clemens, the

nearest military station. He could not bring himself to turn aside from his set plan even in the face of such immediate peril. He started the convoy again at daylight, deviating his route somewhat, but——” Farley made a despairing movement of his lean brown hands.

“That’s the end of the story he told Heinrich, so far as a connected sequence of events goes,” he said. “Heinrich told my father that Grandy’s talk to him afterward became so disconnected that he could learn nothing more from him. He muttered about the temple and kept saying, over and over: ‘It moves and sways—under it. Look under it. Gulo and I found it. My little black book is there, too. Try to find.’ Heinrich tried to question Grandy, but he couldn’t understand what he meant. He talked and mumbled all day and died just before sunset.”

“We can only infer from what happened to your grandfather that the others in his party were murdered by dacoits, exactly as the wounded dacoit had declared they would be,” commented Malcolm Edwards. “It is strange that their bodies were not found near where your grandfather was picked up by Heinrich’s men.”

“It must have been a complete slaughter,” Farley concurred darkly. “The government sent a large detachment of soldiers up there to capture the band of dacoits and to hunt for

the lost convoy. They gave those chocolate-colored fiends something to think about. Some of them managed to make their get-away, but at least two-thirds of the gang was captured, tried and executed. Not one sign of the men in Grandy's party could be found. It was purely by chance that Heinrich's boys had stumbled upon poor Grandy in the jungle grass. They hadn't seen any dacoits in that part of the jungle, yet they couldn't have been far away from there. Grandy must have fallen almost on the spot where he was knifed. He couldn't have walked far with a dah between his shoulders."

"Of course, the dacoits stripped your grandfather of the belt that held the temple. Still—" Stanley Green made a reflective pause.

"No, Heinrich was straight as a string." Arthur Farley had divined Green's thought. "He didn't know a thing about the temple until after he had told his story. When my father described it and the black belt to him he kept nodding his head while my father was talking. He said he believed Grandy was trying to find out from him whether or not the black belt had been stolen from around his waist. Heinrich couldn't make sense of what he said."

"Maybe the brown men who brought your grandfather from the jungle to Heinrich's place cribbed the belt," was Jimmy's supposition.

"Heinrich said they were trustworthy. I remember as well hearing him talk about that

missing convoy as though it had disappeared yesterday, instead of twenty years ago. I was only eight, but I was a wise-headed kiddie. I'd been brought up with older people and was a bookworm besides. Grandy had always stood for adventure in my mind. My highest ambition was to be like him. To lose him nearly broke my heart. And to think that the temple was gone! He had said it should belong to me some day. I made a vow then and there that as soon as I became a man I would take the trail to Upper Burma and try to solve the mystery of the vanished convoy of rubies and the Temple of Light."

"And he kept his vow," put in his sister eagerly. "He has been up in that country twice. That is where he and Chuma first met. Chuma saved Arthur's life. A tiger almost got him. Chuma killed the tiger. He and Arthur have been comrades ever since then."

"Yes, I've been to the border twice. I've spent plenty of time going over the ground where the convoy disappeared. I've quizzed the natives, whenever I could beguile them into talking, but"—Farley made a faint movement of discouragement—"I've never been able to dig up a bit of a clew. For years I've been watching the large bazaars in Calcutta, Mandalay and Singapore, hoping to find the Temple of Light. Nothing doing. My theory was that the robber who stole it from Grandy's belt in

the jungle might eventually have to sell it. Robbers' gold fades away over night, don't you know? Depend upon it a high-class robber rajah stole the ruby temple. Now all of a sudden the temple has reappeared in Singh's bazaar. Singh probably knows more about the temple than he pretends to know. He's deep as a well, and a treacherous rascal. He has had it in for me ever since I described the temple to him and told him it was my grandfather's. Before then he was fairly civil to me. Afterward he was surly as a jungle wolf whenever I tried to patronize his bazaar.

"Well, the temple has come back." Farley brought one strong brown hand down upon the other with an air of resigned finality. "Sorry I can't persuade you to sell it to me, Mr. Edwards. Since you won't, I'll say I had rather you'd own it than any other fellow I know," he wound up with ingenuous cheerfulness.

"Oh, but you haven't asked me again to-night if I would sell you the temple." Ralph was regarding the Englishman with dancing eyes. "I have changed my mind about it since we heard your story."

"You have!" cried Farley in joyful amazement. "Very good. Name your price and I—"

"I think your sister should have the ruby temple. I am going to give it to her as soon as it is delivered to me to-morrow," Ralph declared with one of the swift flashes of generosity

which figured largely in his impulsive make-up.

"Oh, no!" Margaret Farley exclaimed protestingly. "It is extremely generous in you, Mr. Edwards, but we could not accept such a gift."

"Oh, come now!" Farley expostulated gratefully, "we couldn't possibly let you do it, you know."

Ralph, however, was obdurate. He argued spiritedly that old General Farley had guarded the temple with his life, and, that, as a consequence, no one but his nearest of kin should have possession of it.

"Oh, forget it," he grumbled good-humoredly, then hastily begged Miss Farley's pardon for the lapse. "I've dug up enough shiners to buy twenty temples and still have a few cents left. There are times when money doesn't talk. It just stays dumb like a fish. Do you get me?" This last directly to Arthur Farley.

"Ye-es, but I can't"—Farley hesitated, then he added with half-embarrassed frankness—"Would you mind telling me what you mean by saying you have dug up enough shiners to buy twenty temples. That is the speech of a jewel hunter, or I miss my guess. Are you—" he began with eager hopefulness.

"You've said it," interrupted Ralph, laughing. "We're jewel hounds and we're on our way to Upper Burma. We're out to dig up the very heart of the ruby country."

CHAPTER V

COMRADES OF THE JEWEL TRAIL

“**R**EALLY, you take my breath.” The leaping surprise in Farley’s face indicated his feelings. “I was good and glad you were planning an Upper Burma trip. That you should be jewel prospectors! It’s amazing. What do you think of that, Peggy?” He turned quickly to his sister, his voice vibrating with joyful excitement.

“I think it is *simply wonderful*,” she declared fervently. Brother and sister exchanged radiant smiles. “How I’d love to go prospecting for rubies, too.” She turned brightly to Malcolm Edwards. “Only, Arthur says the jungle is the last place for a woman to set foot in. You see, I am going to sail for England next week. I had worried a good deal about the idea of Arthur and Chuma starting off up country to try to unravel the convoy mystery. Since you have invited him to join your party I shall feel a greater ease of mind. You must have had plenty of adventure as jewel prospectors.” She included the semicircle of men in a charmingly admiring smile.

"Have we?" Ralph's quick rejoinder was full of boyish animation. "Hunting shiners is a great life. Only a fellow has to be ready for whatever comes along. Jewels don't grow in places easily gained. Wherever they're to be found, danger and death lurk near them. First, last and all the time a jewel hunter has to be on the alert."

"I've not had much experience digging out rubies, but I do know the jungle," Arthur Farley said. "As for Chuma here, he is past master of jungle wisdom. He was born and raised in Upper Burma, not far from the Chinese border. He knows the natives up there and how to handle them. Would you be willing Chuma should come with me?" he made direct appeal to Malcolm Edwards.

"Yes. In fact, your man Chuma may be the very man we have been on the lookout for. We particularly need a native guide. Thus far we haven't found one who could measure up to our requirements." The jewel man's eyes came to rest approvingly on the tall, lithe East Indian with his proud dark features and unwavering brown eyes.

"I believe I know precisely the type of native you are looking for." Farley spoke with warmth. "I can gladly recommend Chuma. You will be lucky to have him with the expedition as guide. I know I am the luckiest man in India to be his 'Sahib'."

"I'll say it's a streak of pure luck for the Adventure Boys." Ralph instantly took occasion to thus voice his growing approval of Chuma. He had been covertly eyeing the good-looking, unobtrusive young native and liked his appearance. "How about it, Chuma? Do you lean kindly toward the guide proposition?" He grinned cheerfully at Chuma.

Chuma had thus far preserved a respectful deference toward the group of white men. He could not, however, resist Ralph's expansive, jolly smile. His brown eyes began to dance. There was an answering flash of white teeth and Ralph and Chuma thoroughly understood each other, for good and all.

"Sahib," Chuma spoke in a deep even tone, "my first thought is always for my master, the Sahib Arthur." He made a slight, deferential inclination of his black head toward Farley. "I am glad to go with you to the north because he is going, also. If he were not my master and I had met you, and you had asked me to hire out to you as your guide I should have said I would go with you."

"Much obliged. Glad you've got the right idea about this happy gang," Ralph declared buoyantly, and offered an enthusiastic hand to Chuma. "We may kid you some, but we won't do you. Get that straight."

"Ralph has said it," Malcolm Edwards broke in decidedly. "Right in the beginning please

understand that we do not expect to obtain any personal benefit from your ruby prospect, in case we should happen to locate it, Mr. Farley. Wait a moment." He raised an arresting hand as Farley burst out with: "Oh, I shouldn't——"

"Beg pardon. Go on, please," Farley smilingly begged.

"We shall do our own prospecting for rubies, but we shall be only too ready to help you in any way we can toward finding your lost prospect or in working it, provided you should succeed in relocating it. Strange that all trace of it, seemingly, has been obliterated. Twenty years is not a long stretch of time. Young natives then would be men in their prime now. Surely some of those brown fellows up there must know the location," was Malcolm Edwards's reflective opinion.

"Some of them know, beyond a doubt, but torture wouldn't pry a word from them. They're a wild-acting lot, anyway. After one goes deeper into the jungle, and there are no more native villages along the trail, one comes across them only occasionally. They aren't specially hospitable, either. Are they, Chuma?" He glanced toward his comrade of the trail, and laughed.

"They are dacoits," Chuma returned with conviction. "Their fathers were dacoits who slid like poisonous snakes into the jungle to

escape the English soldiers who were after them. My father and I lived in a little hut near the Chinese border. He was a man of healing who gathered the herbs and made medicines from them. He was learned in books and taught me all I know of reading and language. These dacoits used to come to him for medicine. Sometimes they came with bad wounds to be bound up. They never harmed my father, for he never let any of them know he thought them dacoits. But I hated them, and longed to fight them, for sometimes in the jungle I would find a dead man stabbed through the heart with a dah!

"My father told me they had a secret stronghold in the mountains. He believed it to be near our hut. He used to hear them talk about it in a dialect they thought he did not know. After a while my father sickened with fever and died. Then I was alone in my father's hut until came the Sahib Arthur. He had lost his way in the hills and happened to find my home. That was a happy day for me." Chuma's melancholy features broke up in a bright smile.

"It was a happier day for me when you put the tiger out of commission," Farley genially reminded his partner of the trail.

"It was to be, Sahib Arthur," Chuma returned superstitiously. "We were to meet and share the dangers of the jungles, and, perhaps, at the last, find the lost box of rubies."

"Only we haven't found it yet," Farley jocosely reminded.

"It may be that we shall; Buddha is kind." The Hindoo made a reverent little sign.

"We will stand more chance of relocating the lost ruby prospect this trip than ever before," was Farley's buoyant opinion. "You see, my grandfather was a jewel man, too. He had hunted diamonds in the Guianas, and sapphires and rubies in Ceylon. By the rarest kind of luck I've happened to meet you, who are experienced jewel prospectors. Mr. Edwards, here," he nodded gayly toward Ralph, "let that much out. Twice Chuma and I have tried our level best to stir up a few pidgy-bloods in that wild brute of a region. He had an old map of Grandy's, but it had been drawn in pencil and the marks were half obliterated. It was a sketch map which he first made, then made a new map in India ink.

"Do you think your grandfather had the pen and ink map with him when the convoy was attacked by dacoits?" Stanley Green emerged from his usual silence to ask the question. "I'd say he would be more likely to cache such a map. He knew he was apt to be attacked by dacoits on the way to Mandalay."

"No; he left the pen and ink map at home in a secret wall cupboard in his room. He had taken particular pains to make the map a true guide to the part of Burma where he was go-

ing. He had marked his route through the jungle and on up into the hills so plainly as to be easily followed. He had marked the exact location of the ruby-bearing sand, too."

"Where is the map now?" Ralph cast a comically apprehensive glance at Farley. "Don't tell me it's among the missing, keeping company, maybe, with the rosy shiners."

"Yes; it's gone." The Englishman sighed. "Twenty years ago the Farleys were just out of luck, and that's a fact. They had scads of money, but ill-luck perched on their gateposts. This is the sad story of the map. Grandy showed the map to my mother and explained its various points to her. He did not let her see it until the night before he started on what was to be his last expedition to the border. The wall cupboard had a secret mechanism and he showed her how to work it. In the event that he should not return at the end of a year she was then to place the map in the hands of an old friend of his, at that time the Resident. The latter would then prosecute a vigorous private search for Grandy.

"Two or three times after Grandy had gone north my mother looked in the cupboard to see if the map was there. Later, she forgot about it, and did not again recall the matter until a day not long before she received word of his death from Heinrich. Happening to think of the map she opened the wall cupboard to assure

herself of its safety. You can imagine her feelings on discovering it was gone. She was dreadfully upset over it. She knew vaguely the location of Grandy's ruby prospect, but she was not sufficiently well informed regarding it to give directions to a rescue party to the border in case Grandy should not return at the end of a year."

"Did your mother suspect any of your servants of stealing the map?" Ralph asked interestedly.

"No. Our wallahs were honest, faithful fellows. Most of them had been with us for years. Besides, mother was positive no one but herself, my father and Grandy knew about the secret wall cupboard. She suspected some one from outside. Our house had once been the property of an Indian gentleman of great wealth who was suspected of having incited several uprisings of the natives, simply because he hated the English and resented their rule in India. His name was Rahn Behur.

"Mother believed that this East Indian nabob was a gentleman robber and in secret league with robbers. She thought that he either sneaked into the house by a secret entrance, or else he hired one of his men to do so. No one but a person familiar with the mechanism of the secret wall cupboard could have opened it, stolen the map and slipped away like a shadow. She went to Archie Fennimore, a world-famed

investigator who chanced to be in Mandalay for a few weeks. Fennimore agreed with her in her suspicions of Behur and had the fellow put under surveillance. About a week after Fennimore had accepted the case he sent mother word that he would call at our house on a certain afternoon in the week with news. He was discovered lying on the floor of his apartment, face downward, stabbed in the back under the left shoulder with a dah, on the morning of the day he had set to call upon my mother. He must have been murdered during the night. The doctor who examined the body said Fennimore had been dead for several hours."

A united buzz of comment greeted Farley's latest revelation. The Englishman's vivid recital of the mysterious disappearance of the men of the ruby convoy and his grandfather's subsequent tragic end had imbued the jewel hunters with an impulsive desire to assist Farley in clearing away the cloud of mystery which overhung the fate of the vanished ruby convoy.

CHAPTER VI

MARKED MEN

“**A** KNIFING like that ought to have set something stirring.” Ralph was leaning far forward in his chair, his eyes bright with the excitement of Farley’s recital.

“It made a commotion in diplomatic and police circles,” Farley rejoined. “Mason Kent, another clever detective, and a friend of Fennimore, took over the case. He was out of luck, too. He never struck the faintest clew to the murderer. The dah found in Fennimore’s back was exactly like a hundred other dahs. The murderer must have let himself into the apartment with a skeleton key. The door and windows were found locked. Kent had made an appointment with Fennimore in Fennimore’s apartment for ten o’clock that morning. Just before seven, Kubla Shar, Fennimore’s man, came to Kent, terribly upset, saying he could get no response to his knocking on Fennimore’s door. He had not been able to open the door with his key. He thought it was bolted from inside. His sahib had long been marked for death by his enemies. He was afraid evil had come upon him.

"Kent went to the Fennimore apartment with Shar, forced the lock, went in and found Fennimore lying there, dead. His death was a great shock to mother. She dropped the convoy mystery. My father was in England at the time Fennimore was murdered. He was always too deep in government matters to take up the Fennimore murder mystery, though he often talked of doing so.

"Father never gave up trying to get to the bottom of Grandy's murder. He was always keeping a lookout for some sign of a clew." Margaret Farley spoke with a degree of loyal devotion to her father's memory. "But he was caught in the cholera epidemic four years after Grandy's death and died after two dreadful days of suffering. Mother took Arthur and me to England a little later, and we lived there until we completed our studies. Arthur was twenty-four when we came back to India again, and I was twenty-two. Mother died during the year before we came back. We have been here four years. Now I am going back to England, and Arthur is going to realize his dearest hope. He's going north again, and in the best kind of company."

"Things certainly do work out pretty queerly sometimes," was Arthur Farley's half wondering comment. "I can only promise not to be a drag on the outfit. I've roughed it in the jungle enough so that I can watch my step. If I

shouldn't measure up to your requirements as a trailer, believe me, Chuma will."

"Pay no attention to him, Sahibs." Chuma was smiling again in his grave, attractive fashion. "You have yet to know my master. No one is more clever than he when on the trail. No one is braver than he when danger comes near."

"Oh, cheese it, Chuma!" Farley exclaimed in a half-vexed tone. "You don't know what you're talking about. I'm going to change the subject pronto. I'd like to hear some of your adventures, Mr. Edwards. You must have had plenty. You men are the first jewel prospectors I have ever met. I'm fairly bursting with questions I should like to ask you in regard to jewel hunting; that is, if it's proper for me to ask them. I don't know just how secret an occupation jewel hunting is," he concluded, half apologetically.

"Don't let a little thing like that worry you," Stanley Green assured Farley with merrily twinkling eyes. "Ask all the questions you choose. We'll answer them, if we can."

This little preamble served as the opening of a discussion relating to gem hunting which lasted until nearly midnight. Farley was scarcely less eager to learn of the methods employed by jewel men to find precious stones than were the Edwards party to learn more

about the wild jungle region which they purposed to traverse.

Midnight came before they brought the long talk to an end.

"Great Guns!" Ralph was staring at his wrist watch with good-natured consternation. "It's five minutes past twelve! We owe you an apology, Miss Margaret."

"Far from it," was the charming reassurance. "I wish I could express my relief at knowing Arthur will be in such good company. I hope you will come to see us again before I sail for England."

"Oh, we are coming again to call on you to-morrow afternoon to bring you the temple," Ralph made buoyant promise.

"I—we—" stammered the young woman. "Won't you please permit us to buy the temple from you? We understand how you feel about it. Still, you bought it in good faith. It is not fair that you should lose the three thousand pounds you paid for it on account of Arthur and me."

"No;" Ralph shook a smiling head; "the little ruby temple is not for sale. I'm going to enjoy myself a whole lot by presenting it to its rightful owners. Please don't spoil my fun."

Nor could the grateful protestations of both of the Farleys alter his decision. "We'll be here to-morrow afternoon with the temple, Miss Farley," he announced with boyish decision. "I'd advise you to let your brother take it and

have it put in a safety deposit box in your bank until the very day you sail. Your brother can then go to the bank for it and see you safely aboard the steamer. I hope we'll be invited to help with that detail," he added, with his frank smile.

"You will be," Margaret Farley responded happily. "You must give Arthur and me further opportunity, though, to decide in regard to the temple. We should like to see it, even if we can't make up our minds to accept it from you. So please come to see us to-morrow afternoon."

"We will come," Malcolm Edwards assured her. The adventurers had now risen to go. He bowed and shook her hand, then turned to her brother with: "We had best get together soon and list our supplies and camp outfit. We will have to travel lightly on account of the heat. I expect to benefit by your previous trips north. Did you go ponyback, or by elephant?"

"I've tried it both ways. Elephants make better time than ponies but they are hard to manage. Hired elephants are mostly owned by natives who pet them one day and abuse them the next. Elephants are wise old things. They soon learn to hit back. The trouble is they don't go after the fellows who own them and abuse them. They take it out on the fellows their master hires them to—unless one happens to get hold of a well-trained chang. They're safer

than ponies in some ways. Riding elephant-back, one is pretty well out of the way of snakes, and that's something in this snake-infested country. Elephants will fight off wild animals, too, and they can run like the mischief. Still, I'd rather go ponyback," Farley said with decision. "I know where I can secure ponies that will answer our purpose better than elephants. I'll take you to see a horse dealer on the outskirts of Katha. That's a far northern town at the edge of the jungle. We can go from Mandalay to Katha by a river steamer, secure our ponies and a good many of our supplies there, then drop off into the jungle."

"That is all good news. We are anxious to be on our way to Upper Burma and—rubies." Malcolm Edwards added the last word with a smile.

"There will be nothing to keep me in Calcutta after my sister has sailed," Farley returned. "I am at your service. Did I understand you to say that you came here in your own yacht?"

"Yes; the *Swallow* is our boat. She's anchored in the estuary out there." Green waved in the direction of the Ganges River.

"We are going to run around to Rangoon in her, then dry-dock her there till we come back," Ralph further informed their host.

The lateness of the hour precluded the further discussion of plans for the jungle expedi-

tion. The jewel hunters declined the Englishman's offer of his roadster with Chuma as chauffeur, on the plea that they should enjoy the walk home, since a night breeze had sprung up, making the weather many degrees cooler than it had been at sunset.

The quintette of hikers swung along the beautiful avenue on which the Beresford Hotel was located, conversing in low tones as they went. Farley's narration of the tragic death of his grandfather and the mysterious wiping-out of the men of the convoy now furnished them with exciting food for discussion. Deep in conjecture regarding what each man thought might have befallen the luckless convoy, Green alone of the five kept up his usual vigilance. He had traveled the tropics too thoroughly to be caught napping.

Presently he led his comrades out of the avenue and into a fairly wide street which crossed it.

"Where are we, Greenie? This isn't the way we went to the Beresford." Ralph cast a puzzled, half disapproving glance down the long poorly lighted street into which the party of hikers had turned. From both sides of the street the tall, narrow houses seemed to frown down upon them.

"It's a short cut to the Arlington," Green replied. "If I am not mistaken this street runs within a block of the hotel."

"It has nothing on a dark cellar by way of illumination," Bret commented with a chuckle.

"Oh, don't be so particular," Green retorted, echoing the chuckle. "Wuz ums mama's 'ittle boy afraid of the dark?"

"No, you big gump, he wuzn't. So get that straight," Bret flung back breezily.

The street which they were now traversing grew darker as they neared the next corner. They had passed out of radius of the avenue light. The corner they were approaching was unlighted by even an oil lamp. Within the tall, ancient houses lamps burned here and there from behind latticed windows, but with no cheering brightness. The houses themselves were wrapped in dense night shadow. It was then the dark of the moon and only a few faintly twinkling stars pierced the night sky.

"Gee whillikens! What was that?" Ralph uttered the sharp exclamation as something whizzed forcefully past his head with an odd, swishing sound.

The hikers had come to the corner, crossed the street and were perhaps a third of the way down the block when Ralph cried out. Another alarming sound, the ring of steel against stone, brought the five men to a quick stop.

"Look lively. Somebody's got the knife-throwing habit down fine," Ralph warned. "It was a knife that just whizzed past my ear."

CHAPTER VII

A FIGHT IN THE DARK

“**Q**UICK, fellows! We’re in for it. Back to back, and let’s give ’em what they don’t expect.” Green’s alert eyes had picked up first one, then a second shadowy figure just emerging into dim view from behind a low latticed fence which inclosed the tiny black blot of yard in front of the house.

From behind the low lattice work still other moving forms could be distinguished from the darkness of midnight. The shadowy apparitions sprang into dim outline like magic. Then on they came, sweeping down upon the adventurers in sinister silence.

“There are a dozen of ’em, I’ll say. They have nerve to jump us like this in an open street, even if it is a dark proposition,” grumbled Bret as he braced himself against his particular pal, Jimmy Stone, to meet the attack.

There was a brief minute of preparation, at the end of which their assailants were upon them. They sprang at the compact little group of adventurers with the fierceness of wild beasts. The Adventure Boys were prepared

for the onslaught. The foremost assailant, a very tall Hindoo with bare, wiry arms, attempted to engage Green and received a lightning, forceful kick in the stomach that instantly put him out of the running. He reeled backward and sank to the ground with a deep groan. His companions were also discovering that they had tackled a tough proposition.

It was the signal for flashing knives, accompanied by hoarsely vengeful sounds from the big Hindoo's running mates. Instantaneously with the Hindoo's quietus, Malcolm Edwards's revolver spoke. With intent to disable the right arm of the native who had engaged him in combat he had also fired the shot purposely to alarm the seemingly sleeping inhabitants of the dark houses which lined the still darker street.

"One round. Aim wide!" Mr. Edwards sternly commanded. He fired his revolver again, aiming the shot between two of the natives who had already begun to run away from the scene of action. Then the Adventure Boys' revolvers began to pop.

Came a sudden high, shrieking trill. Bret had blown an old-type police whistle which he always carried about with him. It partially served its purpose. The brown men began a scurrying retreat. Three of the natives, however, were not to be thus easily chased away. The three had managed to surround Ralph, who had broken away from his back-to-back posi-

tion with his father when he had lunged forward to kick the Hindoo who had first attacked him.

"Hey, Green. Give me a lift here! They're trying to search me," Ralph shouted, his quick brain instantly divining the robbers' intent.

Two of the assailants had already laid hold of Ralph's arms, while a third brown man with a two-edged, long-bladed knife in one hand was attempting to slash open the wide leather belt Ralph wore about his waist.

Green made one of his lightning-like grabs for the knife. A twist of the Hindoo's wrist, a bellow of savage pain from the native and the knife clattered harmlessly to the stone walk. Next second an "up-lifter" from Green's practiced fist took the fellow a clip under the chin and sent him reeling after the knife. The other two robbers who had engaged in the attempted search with their fallen comrade fled in a panic from the fray.

"They certainly were a brave bunch," scoffed Bret as he wrapped his handkerchief around his right wrist which, sensation, rather than sight, informed him was bleeding from a shallow slash made by one of the robbers' knives. "What kind of fight would you call that? Oh, Boy! They didn't have a ghost of a show from the first. We could have cleaned up twice that much rubbish and never lost an eyelash."

"What kind of street would you call this? That's what I'd like to know?" Jimmy coun-

tered in indignant disgust. "The bunch who live in this street couldn't have failed to hear the shooting and that bird of a screecher you let loose, Hartson. Yet what happened? Not a thing. Did anybody poke his head out the window even to say, 'What's stirring?' Nary a brownie."

"This article at my feet here is going to wake up, pronto." Green was now bending over the brown man he had knocked out. "It looks as though we had somehow played into the hands of the gang against whom Farley warned us. How about locking up this guy and preferring charges against him? We may be able to dig out something of interest by quizzing him. Farley knows their language. We can telephone him and let him do the quizzing."

"A bully idea. We'll tie his hands behind his back while he's groggy. Then we can get him as far as the Arlington and send for an officer. Who has a good, tough piece of string?"

Jimmy supplied Ralph's demand with a long slim leather strap which he had purchased that day for his knapsack. Green finished the binding of the brown man's arms behind him just as the latter came into full consciousness. He made a fierce attempt to sit up, realized that he was tied and showed his teeth at his captors like a snarling wild beast.

"Guess we'll have to treat him rough," Bret said humorously as the robber refused to obey Green's sharp command to get to his feet.

"Guess we will." Green made a sudden downward swoop, caught the fellow by the back of his white tunic and jerked him to his feet amid the cheerfully admiring plaudits of his comrades.

"Wh-h-oo-oo!" exploded the Hindoo. He glanced almost respectfully at Green, then muttered something in Hindustanee. He pretended not to understand when Green peremptorily ordered him to take up the walk to the hotel.

Stanley Green walked on one side of the robber and Ralph on the other. Mr. Edwards walked ahead of them, while Bret and Jimmy brought up the rear.

"Betcha we were shadowed from the time we left the Arlington to go to Farley's," Ralph said to Green in Spanish as they swung briskly along toward the hotel. After some balking the native had subsided and was now walking sulkily along, keeping pace with his captors.

"Yes; we must have had a trailer after us then. He trailed us to the Beresford and waited there for us to come out. That gang of cut-throats was after the temple, of course. They thought you had it with you," Green answered in Spanish.

"The news that I had bought it certainly traveled fast. Ganga Singh must have passed the word to these brownies."

"Guess again. Would an old Wisenheimer like Ganga Singh give a gang of thieves a wrong

steer? It's a cinch that he'd hardly tip them off about it before he'd delivered the temple and received the money for it. I don't believe *he* organized this block party."

"Why did those three brown birds start searching me? Why didn't they pick out Bret or you, or Dad? Because they knew it was I who had bought the temple. How did they know? Not through our bunch, or the Farleys. If Ganga Singh didn't tell them, then who did?" Ralph's voice rose a little on the question.

"That's what I'm wondering myself. There's only one other fellow we can suspect. He's the friend of Singh's whom Singh claimed was the brother-in-law of the man who formerly owned the temple. Of course, we are practically convinced that the only person who truly owned the temple was General Wynne Farley, and suppose we say that it's now the joint property of Margaret and Arthur Farley."

"I don't believe that guff Singh's tried to stuff us with about the brother-in-law of his friend having owned the temple and offered it for sale in his bazaar because he had lost his money and become poor," Ralph said with contemptuous emphasis. "Since the temple has come back, it has probably come back through robbers' hands."

"Exactly. Let me ask you a question. Which would be more likely to frame up a scrap, Singh, or a robber Rajah of the old dacoit

gang that strike for gold and strike to kill?"

"The robber Rajah, I suppose," replied Ralph. "But he'd not have been so simply-silly as to go to the trouble of trailing us, with the temple still in Singh's care. The way the three brownies closed in on me is a pretty fair proof that they thought I had it in my belt, the same way as General Farley had cached it, when he started for Mandalay with the convoy."

"It goes to show that the blamed thieves had heard about the general's belt and jumped to the conclusion that you might be carrying the temple in the same way. That means some one was on deck, urging on this little block party, who had a hand in the convoy disaster twenty years ago. This is how it looks to me. Singh knows, maybe better than he wishes he knew, the dacoit Rajah who pulled off that performance. This dacoit has come to him with the temple, probably because he was hard up and needed quite a large sum of money in a hurry. Singh sold you the temple. After he sold it to you he must have sent word to Friend Dacoit that he had sold it to you. Right there comes a sticking point in my theory. The fellow must have thought you had the temple concealed in your clothing. Singh must have given him some such impression. Dacoits who may be hiding in the city from the law don't make such midnight attacks as the one to-night unless they are playing for high stakes," declared Green.

"But why, in the name of Pete, would old Ganga Singh give Friend Dacoit such a crooked steer?" was Ralph's perplexed question. "He had the temple right there with him, and didn't intend to deliver it till the next day."

"That's exactly the point," Green nodded. "Singh had reasons of his own for making Friend Dacoit think the temple had passed out of his hands."

"You forget the three thousand pounds. What about it? Singh would have to put up his own money in order to bolster his fairy story. He might——"

"He must have put up his own money, I believe. He knew your father was a safe bet," Green said with conviction. "He must have had a strong reason for telling the fellow you had the temple."

"Maybe he thought Friend Dacoit would try to hold us up and that we'd be bumped off. You know how well these Orientals like Americans. Maybe he hoped Friend Dacoit would be put out of the running. He had some kind of murder plan in his ugly old head. I've heard Farley's story of the temple, but I'll betcha Singh can tell one about it, too."

While the two Adventure Boys continued earnestly to discuss the hold-up and the probable dark interference of Ganga Singh behind it, their captive plodded sulkily along between them, his snaky black eyes traveling continually

from the face of one captor to the other. He was not very tall, but of unusual width of shoulder. His matted black hair stood out about his fierce dark features, giving him the look of a wild man. Now and then he broke into a fierce, hoarse chatter of Hindustanee, evidently much alarmed at the prospect he was now facing.

"I wish I knew more Hindustanee. I've no doubt this fellow is chattering everything he knows about this *soirée*," Green said regretfully. "The minute we put an interpreter on the job he will shut up, and stay dumb."

"Surest thing you know," Ralph agreed. "Look; the next block is well-lighted. More like a public street ought to be; especially in a city as large as Calcutta."

The midnight procession was just emerging from the dark into the better-illuminated stretch of the street when something bright flashed across Ralph's eyes and struck the stones beyond with the unmistakable ring of steel against stone.

"Come again!" Ralph's voice rose in a derisive height as he swooped down upon the knife. It lay on the far side of the street now. The thrower had zipped it further than he had intended. It had whizzed harmlessly past Ralph's face and dropped to the empty walk. It was a *dah*, razor-edged and cruel-looking. Ralph picked it up, then gave vent to a surprised: "Great Guns! Just see what I've got."

CHAPTER VIII

A SINISTER MESSAGE

RALPH'S exclamation brought the others to a sudden stop on the sidewalk. They ringed around him as he held up the dah for them to see. Wrapped about the hilt of the knife was a bit of white paper. It was held in place by a piece of narrow tape exactly the color of blood. Ralph unfastened the tape with nimble fingers, then smoothed out the piece of paper. It was thin and fine and tough; almost like parchment.

The adventurers and their still grumbling prisoner had now passed into the better-illuminated part of the street. The stop they made chanced to be directly within the falling rays of a street lamp. Looking over Ralph's shoulder his comrades saw that a single line had been written straight across one side of the paper.

"Oh, shucks!" Ralph called out disappointedly. "The confounded writing is in Hindoostanee. What can you make of it, Green?" he asked his comrade disappointedly.

Green studied the paper by the flickering rays of the street lamp. "Not much," he returned.

He wrinkled his forehead in an attempt at remembrance. One of the words seemed strangely familiar to him. He stared hard at it, mentally going over his small stock of Hindustanee. Then recollection came. "I only know one of these words, but it tells the story. That word is 'Death.' The fellow who organized the block party meant business," he ended with a short laugh.

Green's revelation produced a ripple of excited comment as the jewel hunters curiously scanned the single line of writing.

"Why not make the prisoner useful and find out the meaning of the rest of the scribble?" was Bret's humorous suggestion. "This city has plenty of English inhabitants. Betcha this fellow knows more English than he pretends to know. Let's give him a quizzing and see what happens."

"Go as far as you like," chuckled Green. He knew Bret would soon abandon all idea of making the prisoner useful as an interpreter.

"There is nothing to be gained by fooling with *that* oyster. Whatever he knows he's shut down the shell on; that is, if he knows anything at all," was Jimmy's disgusted opinion after he and Bret had determinedly but vainly quizzed the wild-eyed robber for a matter of five minutes.

"Yes; we will get him inside the hotel quickly and send for the police. It is going on two

o'clock. Time for us to turn in since we've a good deal to do to-morrow. Now that we have decided to add Farley and Chuma to our party, I am anxious to put the *Swallow* under way and get started on our actual journey." Malcolm Edwards swung energetically about and went on leading the van to the hotel.

Fortunately for the adventurers the early morning hour made the march to the hotel with the bandit less conspicuous than would have been the case by daylight. There was no one on the walk near the side entrance of the hotel and only a drowsy, uniformed *chuprassi* (door man) standing at the top of the steps. Keeping a compact formation about the bandit, the group of men ascended the steps and stepped across the threshold into the lounge.

Just inside the lounge door was a small writing room. Ralph and Green steered their catch into it while Bret rang for a bell boy and commissioned him to call the nearest station house and request the lieutenant of police to send a couple of officers to the hotel for the prisoner. He also sent another boy hurrying to find the lounge manager and request him to come to the writing room.

Presently he came, a Hindoo, small, brown, dapper and immaculately attired in white linen, with the tiniest of brush mustaches adorning his upper lip and an air of grave importance which secretly amused the Adventure Boys.

"We have taken the liberty of bringing this fellow into the hotel until the police come for him. We have not yet attracted any annoying attention because of him. We hardly believe we will, since we did not cross the lounge with him," Malcolm Edwards explained with an assured dignity intended to overrule possible objections from the manager.

"Ah, yes, Sahib," the Hindoo returned in English. "It is true that a hotel is no place for those who must be given over to the police. It would have been better for you to take him to the station house yourself. But you are positive that he has broken the law?" He peered disapprovingly at Mr. Edwards.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" burst from Bret sarcastically. "Wouldn't you call stabbing and bandit-ing breaking the law?"

"Easy, Bret." Mr. Edwards shook his head at Bret, who was disgustedly eyeing the dapper manager. The Hindoo was now scowling open displeasure at Bret.

"He's a cross between a simp and a peacock," Bret mumbled in Spanish with a funny inflection that set his chums laughing.

"It was not convenient for us to walk this man through the streets to the police station. We are not familiar with the police system of the city, nor do we know the precise location of any of the jails, station houses or whatever accommodations the city has for housing crim-

inals. We do know, however, we were attacked by a band of thieves not many blocks away from this hotel and that we managed to capture one of them. There is but one reason why this fellow is here now, and you have heard the reason." Malcolm Edwards bent stern eyes upon the now thoroughly peeved Oriental.

"It must be as you wish, Sahib, since you are the guests at this hotel." The little man bowed stiffly from the waist. "The station house is from here a matter of pre-haps one mile. You say you have telephoned? Then pre-haps the po-leece will come in the night for him."

"A lovely prospect," jeered Ralph in Green's ear. "What are we supposed to be doing during all that time? It must be a peppy police force."

"If the po-leece do not come soon, you will please per-meet me to have care of this fellow. The manager of this hotel will not like to have him in the writing room. I do not like it. His tunic is very short and dirty and he walks in his bare feet without even sandals. I will speak to him in his own dialect so that he will know what I want with him." The Oriental waved a hand with an air of superb condescension.

"That's what I'd call pure brass nerve!" Jimmy saw fit to exclaim in Spanish. "Keep your eye on the manager. He's a foxy little brute. If you turn Short Clothes over to him you'll never see him again."

"That would be awful," retorted Bret.

"Oh, quit your kidding," Jimmy threw back, laughing. "Can't you see I'm trying to be serious?" He promptly became silent as the lounge manager began speaking to the prisoner in his own tongue.

The adventurers knew only a few Hindustanee words and phrases. Green was best informed of the five men in this respect. He could, at need, carry on a somewhat halting conversation in the soft, rather graceful language. Try as he might, however, he could now only partially catch and understand the gabbling rush of words which the prisoner suddenly turned loose as a result of a quick guttural question which the lounge manager threw at him.

The lounge manager continued to ask the robber questions in the same guttural tones. It became evident that the prisoner understood him, though the fellow's captors did not. He mumbled answers like a veritable talking machine.

"This poor man says you have made a mistake." The Oriental had masked his displeasure and become politely deprecating. "He has said to me that he saw thieves attack you in the street and ran to help you."

"*Is that a fact?*" The contempt in Ralph's voice fully conveyed his deep scorn. "Ask him what he did with that big two-edged knife he was stabbing the air with when he came at me. If he doesn't know what became of it, I do. I

happen to have it right here with me. Don't waste any sympathy on a bird like him. You have the word of five against his word. He was one of a gang that attacked us back there in the dark part of the street."

"Sahib, you have insulted me." The East Indian's eyes glittered with offended anger.

"Sorry, but I can't see it that way." Ralph eyed the dark, angry face of the Hindoo with coldly measuring glance. "Perhaps you know this fellow."

"Ah-h-h!" Up went the brown man's hands. "You but insult me more, Sahib. Am I not the manager——"

The return of the bellboy, a noiseless-footed young native, with the information that the officers were now on their way to the Arlington interrupted the disgruntled "manager's" protests. Evidently the prisoner had understood the import of the bellboy's message, given in English to Malcolm Edwards. The shadow of fear leaped into his sullen features. Again he addressed himself to the lounge manager, speaking in short, emphatic sentences. The attentive listeners noted that he repeated a word which sounded like "dawn" very frequently.

The lounge manager had apparently forgotten the presence of the quintette of white men. He seemed infinitely more interested in the prisoner and his gabble. Twice he directed a rapid-fire volley of remarks to the unkempt na-

tive in the dirty tunic. The second time the bandit raised his voice in what was undoubtedly an appeal for help, and in an intonation which suggested long acquaintance.

It brought the lounge manager back to a tardy realization that five pairs of coolly appraising eyes were focused upon him. He hastily stopped his conversation with the bandit and said to Malcolm Edwards in an innocently helpful tone: "It is hardly po-seeble that the polleece will come here to-night. You had best permeet me to lock this one up in a large closet where are the brooms and mops kept. This will be a strong place that he cannot break out of."

"Nothing doing." Green vetoed the Hindoo's suggestion with sharp finality. "The police are coming here to-night for this thief if I have to go for them myself. He's going to stay right here with us till the officers get here."

"Hoo-ray! Here come a couple of Tommy Atkinses now." Standing in the doorway of the writing room Ralph had been leaning out, watching the flight of steps leading from the side entrance to the street.

"Tommy Atkins, Tommy Atkins, you're a good one, heart and hand,
You're a credit to your country and your own sweet native land.' "

Ralph could not repress softly whistling several

bars of the old English army song, that is loved the world over. The two stalwart officers in the uniform of the East India police brought the song to his mind as he watched their assured progress up the flight of steps.

"English police. That's fine." Green had also come to the door. "The blamed bandit will never be able to give them the slip."

"Right in here." Ralph called the soft salutation to the pair of officers as they reached the lounge floor of the hotel. "My father is the person who gave you the call. We have a native here. We aren't anxious to keep him as a souvenir." He motioned the officers into the writing room.

"No, I shouldn't care much about keeping him myself," one of the officers said, a flash of fun springing into his big blue eyes as he glimpsed the prisoner. "What is the charge against him?" he asked, his amusement fading into seriousness.

Malcolm Edwards briefly related the incident of the recent attempt at a hold-up. The officers listened without comment until he had finished speaking. The lounge manager, however, suddenly decided he did not care to discuss the matter with the police. He edged toward the door, his movements followed by the baleful eyes of the prisoner.

"Not yet, Brownie." One of the officers reached out and raked in the dapper little man.

"Stay put until I give the signal, 'Go.'"

"I can not stay here more. I am the manager. All the lounge is for me to maneeg." The Hindoo made an angry attempt to shake the officer's compelling hand from his shoulder. "I will make you much trouble. You have insulted my person. I am a manager. You will see." He continued to sputter in Hindustanee.

"Now go easy. Settle down, Dada Naib. I know you from away back, and the first time I ever saw you was when I ran you in for stealing Kashim Bhar's rugs." The blue-eyed officer bent a knowing look upon the little brown man. Look and reminder were too much for the "manager." He gave an audibly horrified gasp and backed into a corner of the room, his black eyes full of malignant resentment for the officer who had just recognized him.

"He's not concerned in this affair, Officer, except as we called him in to it." Malcolm Edwards's sense of justice prompted the explanation.

"He seems to think a whole lot more of our catch than he does us," Bret blurted out satirically. "Those two brownies probably know each other from away back."

"Do you know this fellow?" The blue-eyed officer turned to the abashed manager and rapped out the question.

"No; no." The Hindoo shook a violent head. "Neveer till now have I seen him; ne-veer. I

am Dada Naib; yes, but ne-veer have I steal the rugs of Kashim Bhar. Even Kashim cannot prove this," he added with a touch of defiance.

"I remember." The officer wagged a knowing head. "You got clear of the charge on lack of evidence. Well, it's not my job to run you in to-night. How you got to be lounge manager in a good hotel like the Arlington is a mystery."

"Lounge boss is more of an upper servant job, anyway," said the other policeman. "Besides this hotel is owned and run by a Hindoo, Aram Baid. All right, Bob. Let's be on our way with the wild guy. We've a car at the door."

"Want to prefer charges against him?" asked the blue-eyed officer. "He'll be locked up at Station S. Better take down the address." Green wrote it down at the policeman's dictation. "You are sure to catch Lieutenant Bagley there after three o'clock in the afternoon. He'll be interested in this particular case because he's been after a bunch of brownies that he believes are sure-enough dacoits. Your description of the way you were attacked tallies with a couple of other hold-ups that have been pulled off here this summer."

"I'm going to have him put away." Mr. Edwards was decided in tone. "To-morrow we will bring a friend with us to the station house who may be able to identify this fellow as a da-

coit. We will be at the station house at three o'clock."

Without further delay the officers took charge of the prisoner and marshaled him out of the writing room and on down the steps to the street. He had ceased to grumble now and had relapsed into sullen, downcast silence. As he was being hurried out of the writing room by the officers he cast a vengeful glance at Dada Naib over one shoulder. At the same time he muttered a single word, threatening and angry, which sounded like "dawn."

Happening to glance at the lounge manager Stanley Green noticed two alarm signals flash into the little brown man's eyes. He looked as thoroughly frightened as if he had suddenly seen a ghost. Green also caught the tone of malignance which the wild man used in enunciating the mysterious word. The sailor came to an instant opinion that the pair of oddly-assorted Hindoos had met before; not only that, but also that they shared at least one, perhaps many, secrets.

CHAPTER IX

A STAGGERING SURPRISE FOR RALPH

"THE end of a perfect calling party," yawned Ralph when a little later the Adventure Boys entered the welcome privacy of their suite of rooms. There they might discuss the night's stirring events freely, and without fear of eavesdroppers.

"Blamed if I can guess how that gang of knifers got ahead of us on the way home and lay in wait for us in that dark street. We didn't know we were going to take that short cut to the hotel until Green led us into it," Jimmy said in a puzzled tone. "I didn't see any one hanging around outside the Beresford when we came out of it."

"They were in the offing, watching us, just the same," was Green's reply. "They're clever, these East Indians. They can keep to cover better than any other trailers I've ever come across. They've even got one on the American Indian when it comes to shadowing. When they saw us turn into the side street, they must have ducked into an alley that ran parallel to it and skinned on down to the place where they rushed us."

"Oh, mamma! We certainly played right into their hands!" Bret cried out. "We furnished 'em with a nice dark street, then gave 'em something to throw knives at."

"They thought Ralph had the temple," Mr. Edwards said with conviction.

"Do you hear that?" Ralph nodded to Green. To his father he said, "That's what Green and I believe." Then again to Green "Tell the gang your theory of this hold-up."

Green's view of the matter provoked an animated discussion which lasted for an hour or more. Finally Mr. Edwards wound it up with:

"Better turn in, boys. We must be up by eight at latest. We are to meet Ganga Singh at the bank at ten, you know. I wish to see Farley as soon afterward as I can. Perhaps he and his sister will take luncheon with us. I shall——"

"What was that?" Ralph had straightened in his chair in an attitude of listening.

Mr. Edwards paused abruptly. The others had also become silently alert, and listening. For two or three long moments there was no repetition of the sound which had challenged Ralph's acute ears.

"Guess I must have been hearing things," he finally said, then suddenly raised a warning hand. The sound had come again, a faint swishing sound as though some one were walking in the hall, close to the wall, and brushing against

it. Followed an odd clicking noise as if a door had been closed with a snap.

With the repetition of the sound Green had darted noiselessly to the door of the suite of rooms the adventurers were occupying. There was a large sitting and two medium-sized bedrooms, one room opening into another. The doorways between the rooms were curtained only with light summer draperies. Of the suite the sitting room door alone opened upon the hall. Green opened it softly and peered out into the still brightly lighted hall. It was deserted of occupants. He listened sharply for any sound from the suite across the hall which might indicate the presence there of an occupant. This particular suite, a duplicate of the one the Adventure Boys were then occupying, had been vacant when they had arrived at the hotel, and was still vacant.

"Anything stirring?" Ralph muttered in Green's right ear as he leaned across his comrade's shoulder and gave the hall a quick once-over. Bret poked his head out the door over Green's other shoulder.

"I thought there was. I heard something. It sounded like some one rubbing against the wall right here in the sitting room; then a click; like a door snapping shut. It must have been in the hall. Maybe a pussy-footer has been hugging the wall trying to hear us talk. He might have heard you say, 'What was that?' and taken

a jump across the hall to the vacant suite. Maybe that click came when the door over there was shut in a hurry."

"It may have been Brownie," Bret said. "It would be about his speed to come pussy-footing up here."

"He is the only one who would derive any satisfaction from sneaking around our quarters," Jimmy declared. He executed a funny little pantomimic imitation of Dado Naib. "Believe me, some manager."

"Farley said we might expect to be shadowed wherever we went on account of the temple. That's a glorious prospect." Ralph made an impatient gesture. "Well, I'd rather the da-coits would think I had it than Miss Farley. She will escape being shadowed. Anyhow, these cut-throat brownies won't be able to keep a line on us, once we are on board the *Swallow* again. That's the time we'll throw them away off the trail."

"What would you have done with the temple if you had kept it?" Green asked interestedly.

"Oh, I don't know. Let me see." Ralph wrinkled his forehead in earnest thought. "I guess I'd have done what General Farley did. I'd have had a special belt made and cached the temple in it. I'd not have intrusted it to a safety deposit vault in a Calcutta bank. Sure as a gun it would have been robbed, and good-by, ruby temple. What would you have

done with it, Greenie, if it had been yours?"

"Had the belt made," was the sailor's prompt answer.

"Our pussy-footer has beat it, evidently," Ralph yawned widely. "Come on. Let's turn in. I'm too sleepy to care who has it in for us."

"Back in a minute." Green sped noiselessly down the hall to its east end. There he paused, glancing shrewdly up and down the intersecting corridor. He returned, shaking his head. "Nothing stirring," he reported. "It wasn't a false alarm. Some one was on the job, spying. Go into our suite, Ralph, and start a conversation with Bret. I'd like to find out whether a person standing outside our rooms in this corridor, close to the wall, could hear what was said in the suite."

Yawning, Ralph obligingly complied with Green's request. He and Bret were in the midst of an exchange of flippant pleasantries when Green appeared in the sitting room.

"I could hear you talking, but couldn't make out a blamed word you were saying," he informed the two young men.

"Then we should worry," Ralph said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Make no mistake, the other fellow will do the worrying if any of this gang should happen to catch him holding up the wall out there."

In spite of the short sleep the Adventure Boys had snatched in the early morning hours they

were up and stirring by eight o'clock that morning. The Metropolitan Bank, with which Malcolm Edwards had transacted his financial business since the adventurers' arrival in Calcutta, was less than a mile from the Arlington Hotel. The heat of the day had already become intense. The jewel hunters were only too ready to drive to the bank in a taxicab. They had agreed to meet Ganga Singh there at ten o'clock. It still lacked five minutes of the hour when they emerged from their taxicab and crossed the wide stone walk to the broad flight of steps which ascended to the bank's imposing vestibule.

"Puzzle: find old Gander Sing," murmured Bret when a quick survey of the great banking room by five pairs of sharp eyes failed to pick up the Hindoo bazaar owner. "What's the matter with him, I wonder?"

"Give him time. It still lacks half a minute of ten o'clock." Jimmy was consulting his wrist watch.

"Maybe some knife-slingers tried to use him for a target last night, and got away with it," was Bret's cheerful suggestion.

Five minutes passed, then ten. Still Ganga Singh did not appear to keep his appointment with the Edwards party.

"Oh, say, Oom Bossy Edwards, we can't hang around here all day waiting for Singh." After half an hour's wait Ralph's youthful impatience of delay burst forth.

"We will wait here until eleven o'clock. Then we shall have given Singh an hour—time enough to have sent a messenger here in case of an unavoidable delay on his part, or to have had me paged in the bank and put in touch with him by telephone. If, at the end of an hour, we have neither seen nor received any word from him we will drive to the bazaar with the purchase price of the temple. I can arrange with the treasurer here at the bank for the money. I am sorry we purchased the temple out of banking hours yesterday."

"So am I," Ralph agreed regretfully. "Otherwise, we'd have made old Gander Singh shut up shop and take a walk with us to the bank. The price he soaked me for the temple warranted a little special exercise on his part."

The hands of the wrought metal wall clock, high on the wall at the east end of the room pointed to five minutes past eleven when Mr. Edwards said: "Glad we didn't send away the taxi. We'll go over to the bazaar."

"This is a fine way to do business," scolded Ralph as the taxicab began threading a slow path among the surging press of vehicles which thronged the streets.

"A—hem! Did I hear you say something yesterday about buying a ruby temple?" quizzed Bret with an air of elaborate interest.

"Never mind what I said yesterday. Today's actions'll speak louder than yesterday's

words unless you put on the brake," warned Ralph. Nevertheless he could not repress a faint snicker.

"Oh, don't say so. It might never happen," flung back Bret, echoing the snicker.

"What do you believe *has* happened, Green?" was Ralph's suddenly earnest question. Stanley Green's opinion was valued by the adventurers. Even Mr. Edwards deferred to the one-time sailor because of his great knowledge of races and customs and his shrewd ability to read human nature.

"I don't know," Green said flatly. "At a guess, I'd say, something unusual, though. An Oriental, such as this Ganga Singh, takes the utmost pride in keeping his word in business. His shop is really high-class, you know."

"He may have been occupied with customers and could not leave the bazaar until after they had gone," Mr. Edwards said. "That may also account for his failure to telephone us at the bank. He has no telephone. He was perhaps unable to leave the shop to go to the nearest pay station. I can only hope he was not set upon in the street last night by thieves, as we were."

"The confounded temple has everybody going," Ralph said ruefully. "If I have any more jinx luck on account of it I'm going to present it to India as a national Jonah."

"Don't worry; you may never see it again," was Jimmy's teasing comment.

"Oh, have a heart! Don't make me feel so bad," was Ralph's mocking plea.

Half an hour's slow progress in the taxicab, due to the teeming streets, brought the Edwards group within a block of Ganga Singh's bazaar. A turn of the curb and they were in sight of it. As nearly as they could judge the shop was open. They had half expected to find it closed.

"Now what do you suppose is the matter with old Turban-top?" Ralph demanded with half impatience. The adventurers had left the taxicab in front of the shop and stepped into the bazaar. Ralph's annoyed question came after a wait of perhaps five minutes, in which time neither Ganga Singh nor any other person appeared from behind the long silk embroidered curtains at the back of the bazaar.

"Hello, Singh. Hello-o-o, Singh!" He suddenly raised a ringing call. It echoed through the large room, then died into a peculiar silence. Ralph repeated the call several times. He had an odd suspicion that there was some one behind the curtains in the inner room. He longed to walk over to the heavy portières and push them aside.

"Singh must be somewhere in the offing," he declared vexedly. "He'd never leave a shop full of valuables, such as he has, wide open, and be fifty feet away from it. He certainly has been here this A. M. If he hadn't been, the bazaar would be locked up tighter than a jail. What'll

we do, Dad? Had we better stay around here for a while and wait for him to come on the job, or shall we go back to the Arlington and send a messenger for him about one o'clock, ordering him to be at the bank at two, sharp, with the temple?"

"We'll wait here a few minutes," decided Mr. Edwards.

"Hel-lo-o, Singh! I say, Singh-h-h. Where are you, anyway?" Ralph lifted his voice again in an impatient yell.

Came a rippling movement of the heavy, embroidered portières. Next they parted and a man stepped into view between them. The man was not Ganga Singh; nor any one who remotely resembled the Hindoo bazaar owner, except in the matter of height. Like Singh, he was very tall and was dressed in a long, coat-like robe of natural linen, similar to the style in which Ganga Singh usually dressed.

The turban which the stranger wore on his head prevented the adventurers from glimpsing the shape of his head and his hair. Moreover, he peered at them through heavy shell-rimmed glasses and the flowing black beard he wore went far toward concealing the lower part of his face. They could really tell very little about him.

"Sahibs," the stranger addressed them in a deep, well modulated voice, "Ganga Singh is not here. He has gone far away on some busi-

ness of his own. I am his cousin and have promised to keep the bazaar for him until he returns. What is it you desire from my cousin Singh, Sahibs? But tell me and I will do your magnificent pleasure, if I can."

Ralph shook an emphatic head. "No," he said shortly. "Our business is with Singh. Unless he left word with you for us," he added with sudden recollection. "Singh was to be at a certain city bank at ten o'clock this morning. He had an appointment there with my father and me. He did not come, so we came here. Did he mention the appointment to you?" Ralph noted the brightness of the Hindoo's eyes even behind the heavy-rimmed glasses.

"Young Sahib, Ganga Singh has said to me nothing of this appointment. Last night he came to me at my house and said he must take a long journey because of his business. So he asked me to keep the bazaar open until three o'clock each afternoon. I am here to do this. That is all I can tell you, Sahibs, unless you wish to tell me your business with Ganga Singh."

"I'll be blest if I will," Ralph muttered to his father. "What do you make of it, Dad? Would you, or wouldn't you, ask him about the ruby temple? It certainly isn't in the show case, but Singh may have put it in a safe or strong box." Ralph had dropped into Spanish for privacy's sake.

"Maybe he changed his mind about selling it

to you. Farley offered him more for the temple, you know, when he was here in the shop. He may have put the higher price he'd get from Farley ahead of his grudge against him," Green said contemplatively.

"That would account for the way he is keeping strictly out of sight," was Jimmy's skeptical view. "He had the nerve to put over such a tricky stunt, but he didn't have the nerve to face the music. I'd ask this goggle-eyed guy with the flowing, fluttering whiskers about the temple, if I were you, Ralph. He knows a whole lot more about Cousin Gander and his business than he pretends to know. He has a pretty fair line on Gander's bazaar and what's in it, or he wouldn't be tending it in old Singh's place. How about it, Oom Bossy Edwards?" Jimmy appealed to Malcomn Edwards for corroboration.

Malcolm Edwards had not yet replied to Ralph's anxious question. He was silently considering the situation in order to form a plan of action. While he listened to Green's and Jimmy's respective guesses he covertly watched the Oriental. The Hindoo was making a faint pretext of rearranging a set of teak shelves crowded with images of Buddha, war gods, ivory carvings, vases and other Oriental curios. Mr. Edwards was convinced, however, that the brown man was trying to hear what the jewel hunters were saying.

"Be guarded in what you say. Pass the word," he murmured to Green, who stood next to him before the show case. "I believe he understands Spanish. To Ralph, on his other side, he said: "Let me ask him about the temple. Watch his face as he answers me."

"Show me the face, first," muttered Ralph, with a half suppressed chuckle. "What ought to be a face is all goggles and whiskers."

"Will you kindly give me your attention?" Mr. Edwards addressed the seemingly industrious bazaar tender in a tone of quiet authority.

The Oriental swung slowly about from the set of shelves and came over to the show case in leisurely fashion. "You have spoken, Sahib. What is it you wish?"

"My son made an important purchase yesterday from Ganga Singh. Do you know anything about a curio of gold and rubies in the form of a temple, called the Temple of Light? My son purchased the Temple of Light."

"The Temple of Light. Y-e-s-s; the Temple of Light." The Oriental's sudden hissing repetition of the name sounded like the spitting of a cobra. He thrust his head forward with a furious snake-like movement. "Who is-s-s Ganga Singh that he has dared to sell the sacred temple, and to an accursed foreigner?"

"So you *do* know something about it!" Ralph exclaimed triumphantly.

"We must ask you to meet us frankly and tell us what we may expect in the matter of the temple. It was to be delivered to us at the bank we are using at ten o'clock this morning by Singh himself. He did not appear, so we have come to find out the reason for his failure to keep the appointment we made." Mr. Edwards's voice vibrated with stern purpose. He did not intend to dally over the matter with the strange Hindoo.

"Sahib, do I understand you to say that you have not now the temple in your possession?" The Oriental's voice had risen to agitated heights. "Has not then Ganga Singh delivered to you this temple?" He came close to shouting the second question.

"He certainly has not. That's what it's all about," Ralph declared with energetic emphasis. "He sold it to me yesterday, so far as promising it should be mine when the sum of money he asked for it had been handed him. We were to make the exchange this morning at the bank."

"Buddha be merciful!" The Hindoo raised his arms with a despairing wave. "Only Ganga Singh knows where the temple is. It is he who has taken it away for his own profit. Young Sahib, you will never see the Temple of Light again, or you, either, hated Americans. *I am glad. Oh-h-h-h!*" With another impassioned upflinging of his arms the Hindoo turned and bolted between the embroidered portières.

CHAPTER X

EAST IS EAST, AND WEST IS WEST

“**G**REAT grief! What kind of performance would you call that?” Ralph demanded of his comrades in nettled disgust. “Hey, Boy; you’ve got to come back and do some explaining. Do you think he’ll come running if I call out ‘Whiskers’?”

“No, Ralph. Cut out all pet names,” was his father’s terse counsel. “Simply call out, ‘Hello’ and ‘Proprietor.’ If he doesn’t answer to either call it means he doesn’t care to have any further talk with us. I doubt if it would be of any gain to talk further with him. It has evidently given him an awful jolt to learn that we haven’t the temple.”

“It’s given me a worse one to know I’m out one little ruby temple, too,” was Ralph’s rueful reply. “I wish I had never seen the confounded old temple. Here I’ve promised it to Margaret Farley, as having the best right to it! And I can’t make good! Oh, shucks, rats, cheese-cake!” Ralph continued to rally his large slang vocabulary to the further expression of his boyish displeasure at the loss of the ruby temple. “Here goes. I’m going to raise a few whoops. He’ll be more than glad to poke his fat head through those curtains and tell me to quit. If that doesn’t work I may start and rough house

the place. I ought to do it. Singh deserves it for trying to make a monkey of me."

"It's just the kind of queer deal you might expect from one of these slinky brown snake charmers," Jimmy observed reflectively. "Most of 'em look as though they were carrying the world's great mystery around with 'em and were afraid some one might suspect 'em."

"What is the world's great mystery?" Bret demanded teasingly.

"The ruby temple, I'll say," retorted Ralph. "If it isn't, it's a good imitation of the W.G.M. This flivver gets me, though. It was Singh's privilege to sell the temple to whom he pleased. But why the mischief did he sell it to me and then decamp with it? That's what he's done, I believe. He has probably sold the temple for more even than Farley offered him for it. Just now he is keeping to cover to avoid a reckoning with Dad and me."

"Whiskers said Singh had faded with the temple for his own profit," Bret reminded the group of disappointed jewel hunters.

"That seemed to please him better than knowing we bought it," Ralph said. "Evidently, he wasn't crazy about us. It's a safe bet that Whiskers has gone for the day. All we can do is to go back to the hotel, have luncheon and go over to the Beresford to see the Farleys. Oh, Christmas! I hate to tell Miss Farley I haven't the temple."

"The Hindoo who blew up and beat it behind

those curtains is no simple native," Stanley Green announced with quiet conviction. "He was watching us like a hawk behind his glasses. His eyes were bright. There was nothing the matter with them. And his whiskers! False, but so well adjusted they would almost defy detection. Did you notice his voice and his English? It was the English of an educated Oriental. Come on. Let's get away from here." Green had kept his voice keyed very low, speaking in Spanish. "I feel pretty sure this fellow is sitting tight behind the curtains."

Five pairs of eyes quickly focused themselves upon the heavy portières as Green voiced his impression.

"I dare you to walk over to those curtains and open them," Jimmy muttered to Ralph.

"Nope. I'd like to give them a good strong pull and take a peek at what's behind them, but, well— Would you do it?" Ralph pointedly addressed Jimmy, who was grinning cheerfully.

"Nope. Too much like being nosey," Jimmy continued to beam on Ralph.

"Then why in Pete's name did you dare me to do it?" Ralph demanded.

"Only to see what you'd say. I knew you wouldn't do it. I have a great deal of confidence in you, Oom Bossy Ralph."

"Don't have too much confidence in me. You are likely to lose it," Ralph threatened, then laughed.

The adventurers were now at the arched entrance of the bazaar. Next moment they were again on the sidewalk and crossing the street to the point opposite the bazaar where they had left the taxicab in which they had come.

Green happened to be first to step into the taxicab. Immediately he turned his attention toward the bazaar. The driver of the taxi was just about to start his car. The taxicab began to move. Green caught a fleeting glimpse of a tall, turbaned man moving about within the bazaar. Then the taxicab rounded the corner above Ganga Singh's bazaar and it was lost to view.

"Say, Greenie," Bret broke out excitedly, "did you see any one moving around in Gander's bazaar? I thought I caught sight of Whiskers again."

"I saw some one; a tall man with a turban. I have an idea it was Whiskers. Betcha he wasn't twenty-five feet away from us while we were standing there in the bazaar after he bolted."

"What's your theory about this temple business, Stan? Where does Whiskers come in on it?" Ralph's usually merry features had set in disapproving lines. "I'm pretty sore over this deal Singh has handed me."

"Don't you know who Whiskers is?" Green was eyeing Ralph with a peculiarly wise expression. "Think it over."

"Um-m-m. Whiskers is—" Ralph paused

to consider the identity of Whiskers. Who is he, Oom Bossy Edwards? Do you know?" His father was seated opposite him on one of the small seats in the tonneau of the taxi.

"Stanley, do you believe that this Hindoo we just talked with may be the robber Rajah?" Malcolm Edwards's quick brain had leaped to the same conclusion as Green's.

Green nodded. "I think it highly probable that he is the man who placed the temple in Singh's bazaar. Did you notice his high and mighty manner; and the way he swanked around the bazaar? And how he hated us! I've heard that dacoits have it in for Englishmen first; then Americans next. He had a Rajah manner; make no mistake about that."

"Yes. That would also seem to point to the fact that Ganga Singh had told this robber Rajah, if he is a bandit, that we had bought the temple and that it had been delivered to us. You recall we decided it might be the chief reason for an attack upon us in the street last night," Malcolm Edwards argued with sudden conviction.

"Right-o," Green made brisk reply. "That brings the matter up to Singh. Why did he deceive the robber Rajah about having delivered the temple to us yesterday? Because he did not intend the Rajah to know he still had the temple in his possession. I believe he set the Rajah upon us, thinking it would clear the way

for him to beat it with the temple. He may have figured that by the time the Rajah was through with our bunch he would be safely hidden from him. It's hard to tell what Singh's motive was. He and the Rajah were playing the real game, and we were only pawns upon their chessboard. We'll never know the rights of the thing, I guess."

"And I'll never see the temple again, blame take it," chimed in Ralph half morosely. "Judas priest! Farley will be wild when he hears the latest about the Temple of Light."

"Gander must have put it over very smoothly," Jimmy said. "Whiskers didn't know we hadn't the temple till he heard the news from Ralph."

"We ought to hand ourselves a few bouquets for fighting off the dacoits last night. They certainly didn't find out by rushing us whether Ralph was, or was not, carrying it in his clothing." This from Bret with some pride.

"That's what brought Whiskers to the bazaar this morning—perhaps," Jimmy guessed. "He may have come to blow Gander up for not letting him know beforehand what a strongarm squad we were."

"But, if Gander beat it last night for the woods, who opened the bazaar this morning?" Bret wanted to know.

"Maybe he didn't beat it. Maybe Gander and Whiskers quarreled and Gander got carved with

a dah," was Jimmy's gruesome suggestion.

"I should like to talk this affair over with Farley. He knows his India. Besides, he has a greater interest in the temple than we have. He may consider a police probe necessary. Since this transaction of Ralph's has involved such a valuable curio it seems as though an inquiry should be instituted for the purpose of learning what has become of Singh. There is plenty of possibility that he may have been murdered. Judging from the way we were set upon last night in an open street, I'd say there was considerable probability," Mr. Edwards asserted. "Singh's disappearance should be investigated. It will be, so far as I can arrange to bring it about."

The adventurers continued to discuss the puzzling situation brought about by Ralph's temple transaction. They reached the hotel before they were aware of having arrived there and went into the grill for luncheon still deep in conversation germane to the affair.

None of the Adventure Boys yearned for the unpleasant task of apprising the Farleys of Ralph's loss. Ralph had vainly tried to appoint first one, then another of his chums as carrier of the bad news. All three had politely refused "to be the goat."

"Oh, go to grass, all of you," he finally threw at the grinning trio. "I never intended to let you tell the Farleys, anyway. I just asked you

to see what you'd hand me. It's about what I might expect, in the circumstances—ahem!"

The deep disappointment with which Arthur and Margaret Farley received the news of the loss of the temple brought the Adventure Boys' ready sympathy to the foreground.

"Oh, dear. It is simply maddening to know that we have had the temple almost within grasp and then have had it snatched away!" Margaret Farley's soft tones quavered suspiciously. She was very near to tears, but was bravely forcing them back rather than "behave like a silly goose."

"It's a bally shame. It certainly is a crusher. I hardly know what to say, or think." Disappointment was written large upon the Englishman's strong features. "I agree with you about instituting an inquiry into Singh's sudden strange disappearance. Frankly, I hardly believe he has been murdered. He is the craftiest old fox in India. He has a reputation for slipping out of trouble and bobbing up serenely afterward, looking like a confounded wooden Indian."

"He didn't seem to grudge us the ruby temple," Ralph commented. "Whiskers was the temple's little papa, I'll say. He couldn't see the temple on our piano. These Orientals have a profound contempt for us. They regard us as freshies and fatheads. We should worry." Ralph's merry smile broke out.

“Oh, East is East, and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.”

Green quoted the opening lines of the famous Kipling poem with a touch of whimsical satire.

“It’s true as truth.” Arthur Farley nodded slowly. “The East is aged with knowledge. These East Indians know more in childhood of life and its intricacies than the rest of the world will ever know. They are steeped in mystery. That is why one seldom understands them. The Occidental and the Oriental rarely find much in common.”

“You forget Chuma, Arthur. He is an exception,” Miss Farley said to the callers. “Chuma is the best friend Arthur has ever had.”

“Chuma has a great heart,” Farley declared loyally. “He is devoted to my interests. The only thing he and I do not agree upon is the subject of the temple. He insists that it is unlucky; that the rubies in it are Evil Eyes. He says it has never brought anything but misfortune to the Farley family. He’ll be more than ever convinced that he’s right about it when he hears what happened to you last night, my friends.”

The adventurers had not yet seen Chuma, who was still out in the streets on an errand for his master. Arthur Farley himself had come

down to the hotel lounge to meet them on their arrival at the Beresford.

"It truly seems as though the temple were unlucky," Margaret Farley remarked whimsically. "I'm going to make myself believe that we are, perhaps, better off without it. I don't wish ill fortune to overtake me on my voyage to England. Just as though it might on account of owning a valuable curio! Please don't think me superstitious!" she protested in the next breath. "I'm not. Only, the temple has seemingly been nothing but a source of trouble to the Farleys. Chuma is right about that."

"If only we could know who gave my grandfather the temple. We have always been in the dark about it," Arthur Farley said with a regretful sigh. "Why should Ganga Singh have pretended to me not to know of the existence of such a curio? Why was he ready and willing to sell it to you, Mr. Edwards? What had he to do with the attack upon your crowd in the street last night? Why did he lie about the delivery of the temple to this whiskered chap whom you suspect of being the dacoit leader who brought it to him? When we can answer these questions we'll be on the way to finding out where the Temple of Light has been cached for the past twenty years, and why it was placed in a bazaar for sale. And that will be a long step toward clearing up the ruby convoy mystery."

CHAPTER XI

THE MEANING OF "D-A-W-N"

"**W**HAT do you say to going over to the bazaar this afternoon for a look around?" was Farley's suggestion as the sextette of men again took possession of the taxicab in which they had come to the Beresford for their call at the station house.

"A good idea," Malcolm Edwards warmly assented. "I should like to see what is going on there. I can't swallow the guff the big Hindoo gave out yesterday about being there to tend shop for Ganga Singh."

"I'll be more surprised to find the shop open and Whiskers on the job than to see it closed," Ralph said lightly.

"Robber Rajahs don't waste their time tending bazaars," Green commented with humorous dryness. "This big fellow was disguised from top to toe. The only thing he couldn't, or rather, didn't disguise was a high and mighty manner. It gave him dead away. At least, I thought so."

"You seem to have put your eyes to good use," Farley's accent bespoke approbation. "If

he had been with the gang that jumped you folks last night you would undoubtedly have recognized him by his figure and manner when you saw him in the bazaar."

"Yes, I would have spotted him in a minute," Green affirmed. "Believe me, he's not the boy for street fights. That Hindoo is of high caste. Quite likely he plans these hold-ups, then orders his dacoits to carry them out."

"They whanged up against real trouble last night when they came at us." Jimmy could not keep a note of triumph out of his voice. "We handed 'em some peachy wallops. If they had guns they didn't use them. They were packing dahs. We got a few little slashes, but no bad perforations."

"It's a confounded outrage!" Farley brought one of his clenched fists down hard upon his open palm. "I mean, the way you were set upon on the street by those jungle wolves. I'm going to take this affair straight to the front. I'll not stop until I've had the satisfaction of knowing that this city is clear of dacoits. I'll put the military special police upon the trail of these cut-throats. Dacoit-ism was supposedly done away with long ago. You have seen for yourself that it has not been stamped out. I am glad Margaret will soon sail for England. We have both been dogged and shadowed so much we are heartily sick of Calcutta."

"I'm not crazy about this burg myself," Bret

confessed with an inflection that raised a laugh.

"We are all anxious to leave here and strike out for Upper Burma," Mr. Edwards told the Englishman. "I agree with you that drastic measures should be used to clear the city of dacoits. Not because of our run-in with them. We are hardened adventurers, well prepared to defend ourselves. The bandits who attacked us were ready to kill at the slightest pretext. Too bad we couldn't have captured all instead of only one."

"I should like Chuma to see this fellow," said Farley. "I left word with Peggy for him to come over to the station house if he should return soon after we left the hotel."

Miss Farley had been invited to accompany her brother and the adventurers to the station house, but had smilingly declined the invitation. "You will be much more at ease without me," she insisted. "If I joined you, you would all feel it incumbent upon you to defer to me because I am a woman. That would take your mind from the object of your trip. Thank you, just the same."

The six visitors to the station house had hardly more than entered the large square receiving room when Chuma opened the door into the big room from the hall and hurriedly entered. As yet there was no one at the high desk on the narrow platform at the back of the room. Two policemen, one white, the other na-

tive, sat on an oak bench at one side of the room, talking in undertones. From the almost closed door of a side room came the steady murmur of a deep voice. Lieutenant Bagley was evidently within, presumably dictating a letter.

"Sahib Arthur, I was afraid I should not be here in time!" Chuma exclaimed softly. He greeted the Edwards party with evident pleasure, his calm features betraying no sign of curiosity regarding their presence and Arthur Farley's at station S.

"So was I," Farley retorted with humor. "You are strictly on time, Chuma. Great doings, since yesterday, old man. That is, our friends here have gone through some spiffy stunts. I'll ask you to tell Chuma the details, Mr. Edwards." He glanced expectantly toward Malcolm Edwards.

The latter found Chuma a good listener. He quickly put the Hindoo in possession of the main points of the affair of the previous night. He had already shown Arthur Farley the menacing slip of paper which had been wrapped about the handle of the dah. Farley had instantly translated the written words it bore into English as: "Death awaits you."

Chuma examined the fateful bit of paper with deep interest. "This paper," he said, touching a finger to the parchment-like scrap, "is of the old time, and very costly. Once it was used by maharajahs and rajahs and also

the East Indian and English sahibs and memsahibs who had much money. It is now no more made in India."

"There's some more support for your Robber Rajah theory, Green," cried Ralph.

Green smiled. "Every little thing helps," he declared lightly.

At that moment Lieutenant Bagley emerged from the side room, a young Englishman, evidently his clerk, at his heels. The lieutenant was a large, muscularly built man with good-humored, deeply tanned features.

"How are you, gentlemen?" he saluted in a big hearty voice. He had made instant shrewd appraisal of the group of men. "What can I do for you?"

"Good afternoon, Lieutenant." Mr. Edwards returned. "Two of your men came on call to the Arlington Hotel last night to arrest a street bandit. I am Malcolm Edwards, a guest at the hotel, and I sent in the call. I came here to-day with my party to appear against the fellow. I should also like to have Mr. Farley and Chuma, Mr. Farley's man, see the prisoner."

"I'll have him brought in at once." Lieutenant Bagley turned and addressed the two policemen on the oak bench. "Bring in the fellow in Number Twenty," he ordered.

The two officers immediately rose and left the room on their errand.

"It is certainly not the fault of his friends that the fellow is still a prisoner," the lieutenant said with a grim twist of his lips. "There were three attempts made last night, or, rather, this morning while it was dark, to get at him. That proves to me, at least, that you were not attacked by an ordinary gang of street toughs, but by sure-enough dacoits. Suppose you give me an account of the attack."

Malcolm Edwards gave the officer a résumé of the street battle of the previous night. Lieutenant Bagley listened, nodding his head now and then during the recital.

"The dark street you were on when these cut-throats attacked you is Deodar Avenue. In the houses on both sides of the street of the block where you were attacked live a considerable number of retired East Indian merchants. They are this, supposedly. Still, every now and then. I have to send my men down there to stamp out trouble. Knifing parties among the residents of that particular block seem to be all the go. This attack of last night upon you and your party, Mr. Edwards, was a bold performance. I'm going to run down this gang and put a stop to such brigandage." Lieutenant Bagley brought his clenched fist down heavily on the high desk behind which he was now seated. "It is a dacoit trick, from away back, to be an East Indian gentleman by day and a robber by night."

The two policemen now returning with the prisoner, Lieutenant Bagley directed his attention to the bandit. The brown man was not scowling to-day. Instead his facial expression was one of blank stupidity. Addressed by the lieutenant he proved exasperatingly dumb, pretending not to understand half that the officer said to him. He gave his name as Kuro Ghan, insisting that he had recently come to the city from Singapore to visit his brother.

"He is not Kuro Ghan, Sahib Lieutenant," Chuma informed the officer with quiet conclusiveness. "He is Lao Bhar. He comes from Upper Burma and is said to be a dacoit. I knew this one in the days when I lived with my father near the Chinese border. There are many dacoits in this region. All of them are only too ready to rob and kill. I believe the robbers who attacked my Sahib's friends in the street last night were of the same band."

"I am inclined to agree with you," the officer assured Chuma warmly. "I am going to put this rascal through a thorough quiz; make him admit what he really is and where he comes from, if I can pry it out of him. If any of you gentlemen would like to question him, you have my permission to do so."

"I'd like to quiz him a little." Farley addressed the prisoner in Hindustanee.

The fellow stared at the Englishman, but remained silent. Nor would he open his lips when

the lieutenant ordered him to answer Farley's question. He had been all but dumb to the lieutenant's questions. He had now apparently lost his voice. Nor could repeated efforts on both Chuma's and Farley's part break the stubborn seal he had placed upon his lips.

"He'll find his voice before ever he gets out of the station house," the Lieutenant predicted grimly. "When he does get out of here it will be to begin serving a long penitentiary sentence."

"We are expecting to start for Upper Burma soon. It might be well for us to give our deposition now in regard to the street fight last night," Malcolm Edwards finally suggested. On the way to the station house the adventurers had agreed with Farley that the temple incident and Ganga Singh's inexplicable failure to keep his appointment with the Edwards party at the bank should be recounted to Lieutenant Bagley.

The lieutenant listened thoughtfully to Malcolm Edwards's narration, which his clerk proceeded to take down.

"A queer piece of business," he declared at the end of the jewel man's terse statement. "It requires the services of an investigator. This Hindoo, Ganga Singh, has often been suspected of harboring dacoits. Still, nothing has ever yet been proved against him. He has conducted his bazaar along strictly commercial

lines. I have never heard a complaint against him from a customer. He has surely treated you in a most unbusiness-like manner, Mr. Edwards. If he doesn't return within a few days to his bazaar his disappearance will be investigated. It is possible, though barely probable, he has met with foul play. He has always been a man of mystery. His bazaar is rated as one of, if not, the most, unique, in Calcutta. He is widely known in the city, though he seems to have no friends and is a taciturn, unsmiling fellow."

"We are going over to his bazaar after we leave here, Lieutenant Bagley. I wish you would go with us," Mr. Edwards said earnestly.

"I will go with you." The officer accepted the invitation with brisk promptness. "I will also 'phone to headquarters and have a couple of plainclothesmen meet us there."

Presently the prisoner, dumb, and glowering like a thunder cloud, had been returned to his cell, and the Edwards party, together with the lieutenant, were being rapidly driven in the taxi to Ganga Singh's bazaar.

As the taxicab neared the street corner directly below the location of the bazaar, they became aware of an unusual commotion in the narrow street. The murmuring swell of the voices of a crowd suddenly beat upon their ears.

"What in Pete's name is going on there?" Ralph hastily indicated the milling crowd, moving restlessly about in front of—not the curio shop of Singh. It was no longer there. Nothing remained of the bazaar but an expanse of smoking ruins.

"Look, Dad! The confounded bazaar has gone up in smoke!" Ralph shouted in wild excitement. "There's not a stick of it left standing. When did that happen, I wonder?"

The eight men in the taxi piled out of it hurriedly. Next instant they were standing on the edge of the narrow walk in front of where the low, one-story structure had formerly been. A rope had been stretched across in front of the smoking débris, while a native policeman was very busy keeping back the curious, surging crowd outside the rope.

"What do you know concerning this fire?" Lieutenant Bagley was asking the brown policeman in Hindustanee.

"Only a little, Sahib Lieutenant," was the man's respectful answer. "Two hours ago the shop was standing. None knows what started the fire. All of a sudden the bazaar was wrapped in flames. The wood of the building was very old, light and dry. The flames ate it up quickly. So it burned fiercely for an hour, till nothing of it was left. It is the shop of Ganga Singh who had many rare curios of great value."

"Have you seen Singh to-day?" the officer asked the native.

"No, Sahib Lieutenant. I have not seen him since yesterday in the early morning. This morning one came in his place to the bazaar. Singh must then be away for awhile. The one who came here was a very tall man with much hair on his face. I did not see him go away. Perhaps he set fire to the shop and then ran into the alley behind it. But tell me this: Why should one who came to tend the bazaar set it on fire?" the native demanded with a puzzled frown.

"Why, indeed," Arthur Farley murmured half satirically. In a louder tone he said to Ralph: "It looks as though Whiskers had been on the job again to-day. This time with a box of matches. If he is really the Robber Rajah, he must have had it in for Singh, or else that pair of rascals have had a row about the temple."

"They must have had a scrap about it last night between the time we left the bazaar, that was at sunset, and the time we started for the Arlington from your apartment," Green asserted speculatively. "Singh never set those wolves upon us. He was anxious enough to sell the temple."

"That wild hyena over at the station house knows what it's all about," Jimmy said contemptuously. "He could talk fast enough last

night. He was more than tearing off talk to the 'mana-geer'." Jimmy struck a Dada Naib pose, imitating perfectly the little brown manager of the lounge. "By the way, Chuma, what does 'dawn,' or a word in Hindustanee that sounds like 'dawn' mean in English? The knife-slinger we ran in was gabbling to the manager to beat the band while we had him caged in the writing room. He repeated this word that sounds like 'dawn' every two or three sentences. I noticed, too, that Brownie scowled every time the wild man said it."

"'Dawn, dawn'," Chuma repeated reflectively. He knitted his black brows in an effort at placing the word in his native tongue. "I know not this word in Hindustanee," he answered, shaking his head.

"The wild Hyena, and the name suits him, over at Station S is going to do some talking very soon," Lieutenant Bagley significantly assured his companions. "Futhermore, I shall send for Naib, and hear what he has to say."

"'Dawn, dawn'," Chuma was again murmuring the puzzling word half aloud. His mind was hard at work in an effort to find an equivalent of the word. In the midst of his concentration came a flash of memory which made him catch his breath.

"Sahib Arthur, I know this word!" he exclaimed in agitation. It is not 'd-a-w-n,' but 'D-h-o-n.' There can be but one 'Dhon' known

to this dacoit in the station house. That one must be Lalla Dhon." Chuma's words rang with startled wonder.

"By Jinks, you have certainly said something, Chuma." Arthur Farley's features reflected the startled light on Chuma's dark face at his own conjecture. Doubt stepped in. "Oh, it can't be Dhon," he said. "He hasn't been heard of for over twenty years. If he's still alive, he is in some other country. He'd not dare to stay in India, particularly Calcutta. There was a reward of a million rupees offered for his capture, alive or dead, at the time my grandfather went back to Upper Burma. The English government wanted him for having incited a rebellion among the hill men and leading the insurrection."

"Sahib Arthur, there is an old Indian saying: 'More robbers live behind their masks than die,' " Chuma returned with a tinge of stubborn conviction. "Perhaps Lalla Dhon has come back again."

CHAPTER XII

ON THE NORTHERN TRAIL AT LAST

CHUMA'S suspicion that Lalla Dhon, gentleman bandit and dacoit leader, had reappeared after a period of twenty years created considerable commotion in Calcutta police circles. Through the medium of Lieutenant Bagley the law's net was laid to catch the notorious outlaw, if indeed he was in the land of the living. Plainclothesmen were detailed by the chief of the city's police bureau to investigate the conditions existing in the houses on both sides of the street in the particular block where the Edwards party was attacked by bandits.

All trace of the robbers had seemingly been lost. The utmost quiet and dignity were displayed by the well-dressed native residents of the old houses at all times while under secret police surveillance. Nor could the detectives glean from the courteous, but aloof, Hindoos a scrap of information which might be used against them in a criminal court.

Failing to make Lao Bhar "talk," Lieutenant Bagley turned him over to the chief of the police bureau. No amount of quizzing could induce the prisoner to reveal anything derogatory.

tory to himself or his robber companions. Instead, he boldly denied having had any companions in the attack, insisting that he had heard the Americans shout for help and had gone to their rescue.

Dada Naib, however, had not waited for further developments in the affair in the writing room. He had left the Arlington Hotel the morning after Lao Bhar's arrest without giving notice and had made as sudden and mysterious a disappearance as had Ganga Singh. His vanishment was regarded by the detectives as significant of his connection with the bandit, Lao Bhar, and of his secret knowledge of the robber band that had attempted to hold up the jewel hunters.

While the police bureau was busy trying to get to the bottom of the hold-up, the adventurers were equally busy making preparations for their trip to Upper Burma. They had fixed the day of sailing from Calcutta as the next after they should have seen Margaret Farley aboard an ocean steamer en route for England. Presently the day of farewell to Miss Farley came, and the following dawn saw the *Swallow's* nose set toward Rangoon. At Rangoon they carried out their plan of dry docking the *Swallow* and then proceeded northward to Mandalay on a river steamer.

At Mandalay, after a signally interesting and pleasant journey on one of the large comfort-

able river boats that ply the Irrawaddy River, connecting Upper and Lower Burma, they proceeded to the task of getting together their supplies for the hard trip ahead of them, after they should leave the river boat at Katha, a far northern Burmese town, and break into the jungle.

The jewel hunters thoroughly enjoyed the river trip. All day and until late in the evening they lounged on deck in comfortable steamer chairs, watching the fascinating strangeness of the life of the little towns and villages that edged the great river. At Katha they went to the task of making up their packs with a will. They had decided to use ponies instead of elephants and had managed to secure eight sturdy ponies which the horse dealer, of whom they purchased the animals, assured them were jungle-broken.

When it came to traveling the jungle none of the Adventure Boys was a tenderfoot. They had forced their way through all but impenetrable thorns of the African jungles. They had won through the death-laden thickets of the interior of the cannibal island of Guadalcanar, where an unwary movement of foot or hand might release a cleverly hidden knife or spear, or precipitate one of them into a spiked pit. They found the Burmese jungle much the same as the others they had trekked in. There was the same green gloom of riotous vegetation, the same

rank growth of bush and vine, the same dangers to guard against. Now and then in the night they would hear the crashing of wild elephants as the huge beasts passed through the jungle in headlong flight. More than once they had heard the unmistakable cough of a tiger, kept off the camp by the dread of the cheerily burning campfire. Each night two of the outfit stood guard; one man from ten o'clock, when the adventurers usually turned in, until two in the morning; the other from two A. M. until six.

During the daylight hours the jewel hunters forged steadily ahead in spite of the intense heat. It hung like a sticky pall over the dense green jungle. The adventurers' ponies were hardy, wiry beasts, inured to the heat. They followed their leader, a brown pony ridden by Chuma, picking their way surely through bewildering masses of green; ready to send out shrill neighs of warning at the first scent of danger.

At night it was the special duty of those on watch to guard the ponies from the attacks of tigers or leopards. The jewel hunters had followed the method they had used on the African veldt of fastening the ponies to a hitching post made by lopping off the lower limbs of a small tree, converting the tree into a pole and driving it solidly into the ground. The pole was invariably driven into the ground within a few

feet of the spot chosen by the outfit on which to lay their ground sheet. The campers had tried sleeping in trees on several occasions, but were not satisfied with the experiment. While they had heard numbers of tiger yarns they were of the opinion that for sheer boldness a tiger could not compare with a lion. In spite of the bold, predatory tactics of man-eating lions they had not taken to the trees while trekking the veldt. They were of the undaunted opinion that they would be more than a match for prowling tigers or leopards.

Four weeks of steady trekking, from the first dawn of morning until sunset each day, meant many miles of jungle traversed and the hill country along the Chinese border growing nearer and nearer. As guide Chuma proved himself a fearless, cheerful leader during trying days of weary plodding through the enchanted sea of green with its countless hidden perils. Thanks to their wary little ponies the adventurers usually received an alarm from the knowing animals when a cobra crossed their trail or glided within the narrow limits of the night camp. On one occasion the sagacious animals had balked stubbornly at crossing a jungle stream, though nothing could be seen to justify their sudden halt. When Ralph impatiently dismounted and raced down to the edge of the placid stream, he uttered a wild yell of alarm and sprang back just in time to miss the

yawning jaws of an immense crocodile that had lain like a log at the stream's edge with a business eye open for prey.

"These ponies are jungle-broken, I'll say," Jimmy declared with satisfaction to Ralph, late one sultry afternoon, as the weary band of riders halted in a little jungle glade, there to dismount with intent to make camp for the night. "They understand how to trek in this blamed old snake patch almost as well as Chuma does. How about that, Chuma?" The Hindoo had just ridden up beside them.

"About what, Sahib Ralph?" Chuma said in his calm level tones.

"He says the ponies are pretty nearly as good trail-beaters as you are, Chuma," laughed Jimmy.

"It is true, Sahib Jimmy," Chuma nodded. "They are better trekkers than I. They have the natural instinct against danger. I can but use my eyes and keep always on my guard."

"You win, just the same, Chuma," Ralph told him humorously. "Say, Boy, this is the best camp site we've had since we struck the jungle. It won't need much beating-up. See how open it is. I believe I hear water running; somewhere near here, too. Come on, James. You and I will do our little water-carrying stunt."

With his usual breezy impetuosity, Ralph went over to the extra pony which the outfit

used as a burden-carrier, and began to unfasten the pack which was strapped to the animal's back. It was not a specially heavy pack.

It contained the ground sheet, the small two-burner oil stove, the camp water pail and the few cooking utensils necessary to the outfit, together with a number of light odds and ends required by the expeditionists.

Ralph quickly extricated the water pail from among the other articles. He and Jimmy started from the little glade, walking in the direction from which had come the murmuring sound of running water. It was further away from the glade than they had thought. At first they could not locate it, look as they might in every direction. Then they came abruptly upon a kind of natural pass formed by an up-cropping of ragged rock on the one side and by tangled, vine-interwoven thickets on the other. It extended only a few feet, opening into a second smaller glade where the rapidly declining sun sent a few filtering rays down among the trees. On the ragged rocky side of the glade they found the spring, a gush of clear, ice-cold water, breaking from the rocks and hurling itself into a small rocky basin almost at their feet.

"Some spring!" Jimmy had cupped his hands, dipped up the sparkling water and drunk deeply of it. "It's cold as ice. Oh, gee, but it tastes good! Give me the water pail. I'll fill

it. We'd best hot-foot back to the gang with the good news. We can water the ponies here in the basin and fill our water bottles, too, under the flow."

"Go ahead. I'll stay here. I'd like to give this place a once-over." Ralph included the little glade in a sweep of the arm. "Do you mind leading Speedy along with your pony?" Speedy was the name Ralph had given his lively black pony.

"I'll bring him, and the gang, too." Jimmy stopped only long enough to fill the camp water pail, then away he went, slopping water as he ran.

Ralph was already peering about the rocky little glade with his ever buoyant interest in new places. He thought the tangled thicket which edged the lower side of the glade a possible lurking-place for a tiger. He had yet to see one in its native haunts. He had learned from Chuma that a tiger will manage to keep hidden behind a growth of foliage seemingly far too small to give it cover. His hand was on his holster as he stood looking into the dense green thickets below him.

Five minutes passed, then ten. No sound of voices rose, mingled with the clop-clop of ponies' feet to inform Ralph of the approach of his comrades.

"Great guns, but they're slow!" he finally exclaimed. "I thought they'd all come running for

a drink. Something special must be happening in camp." He turned slowly away from the spring, deciding that he had better join the gang. He knew his father would not approve of any separation from his comrades on the jungle trail, no matter how brief. "Guess I'll go up there and see what's happened," he murmured.

He had not taken half a dozen steps out of the rocky glade when he heard a sudden sound which sent an odd thrill through him. Came a dry sputtering cough from somewhere deep in the masses of green below him. Ralph's finger's tightened round his revolver as he drew it out, ready for action. How he wished he had his rifle with him! He had hastily unslung it from his shoulder the instant he had reached the new camp site. He was well aware that his revolver would not furnish sure protection against the attack of a tiger unless he should chance to send a bullet through the tiger's head with his first shot. The report of the revolver, however, would bring his companions, hurrying, to the glade, armed with rifles.

His eyes fixed steadily on the riot of green at the point from which the sinister cough had come, Ralph began to back out of the glade as rapidly as he could. Came another cough, hoarse and menacing. It was followed by a long, low snarl. From out the green rustling screen appeared a huge striped head lighted by blazing baleful eyes and with long bared fangs.

As the tiger's wicked-looking head was suddenly thrust into view Ralph heard another sound which sent a cold shudder racing up and down his spine. He whirled, making a long sideways leap as a second sibilant hiss cut the air. He understood now why the fierce eyes of the tiger had seemed to stare past him instead of at him.

Ralph had seen and killed while traveling the African veldt more than one African cobra. The dreaded "ringhals," or black cobra with a white-ringed neck, is purely an African reptile, growing to a length of six feet and of the thickness of a man's wrist. Since the adventurers' arrival in India they had seen the East Indian fakirs charm cobras which they carried about with them in baskets to the reedy music of native pipes. What he had never before seen was a cobra the size of the one which was now rising upright in the path from the midst of a succession of thick coils. Its terrible, waving, distended head was already poising itself higher than that of the fascinated Adventure Boy.

Luckily for him neither the tiger nor the great snake was paying any attention to him. The strangely assorted pair had eyes only for each other. In the rocky little glade a battle of the jungle was about to begin; a battle between a tiger and a hamadryad, the giant cobra of the East, rarely to be found and most terrible of all Asiatic serpents.

CHAPTER XIII

ENEMIES OF THE JUNGLE

HIS revolver drawn, Ralph planted himself firmly against a tall, jutting piece of rock at the right of the little spring. His frightened leap had carried him well out of the hamadryad's path. He wondered if the giant cobra could throw its venom for a distance of several feet, as is the habit of the ringhals. He hoped it could not. He was concerned to decide whether he had best shoot at the tiger, or empty the chambers of his revolver into the weaving body of the big snake. If he should shoot at the tiger and merely wound it, he was afraid the great, striped beast might spring upon him in a twinkling, regardless of its grudge against the hamadryad. Yet Ralph's pluck urged him to shoot at the tiger. It was infinitely more dangerous than the snake.

Snarling wickedly, the tiger made a sudden bound out of the thicket and into the path within eight or ten feet of the hissing serpent. There the furious beast halted, its long, yellow teeth showing in enraged challenge of its ancient jungle enemy. For the hamadryad is hated above

all serpents by the four-footed jungle tribe of India.

The giant cobra made a swift forward rush toward the tiger as the beast sprang into the path. Its venomous fangs emptied themselves upon the air. It gathered itself together again like lightning for another forward rush upon its snarling adversary. Quickly as it struck, the tiger moved a shade more quickly, dodging by not more than an inch the dripping poison fangs of the hamadryad. Next instant the tiger had made a flashing, curving leap that brought him up even, but a little to one side of the snake. Of a sudden the big striped beast launched forth with one of its formidable, tearing paws. The tiger's long claws cut through the hamadryad's tough skin, piercing to the quick and inflicting a great ragged tear in one of the massed brown coils.

As the hamadryad writhed in agony, striking madly at the tiger, the latter made another lightning strike, tearing the snake's tissues afresh. That was his second and last inning. In a fury of rage the serpent landed a fresh charge of venom straight into the jungle king's nose. Up went the tiger's paw to shield its eyes. Roaring, the animal struck blindly at the snake with its other paw. Again the hamadryad reared afresh and buried its fangs in the tiger's nose.

"He's done!" Ralph shouted in his excite-

ment. "By gracious, the big cobra knows it. It's going to beat it." The cobra's coils had begun to ripple, preparatory to flight. "Oh, no you don't Cobby." He took quick aim, and fired.

"Shucks!" he cried in vexation. He had missed the snake. It had whipped itself into flight in a flashing instant, disappearing before his eyes as though by magic. For an instant Ralph forgot the tiger. Alarmed recollection brought his revolver to bear upon the animal. It was half way into the thicket out of which it had come, and was uttering deep, snarling moans. Ralph took quick aim and fired twice at the tawny, vanishing beast. Loud snarls of pain from the tiger told him he had not missed fire.

"It's a dead one, anyhow," he said aloud. "It can't go far with such a shot of venom in its face as the big cobra handed it. I'd never have believed that a snake could win so easily as that against a tiger."

"Halloo-oo. Halloo-oo!" was suddenly borne upon the sultry air.

"The gang at last. About time, too." Ralph drew a long breath of anticipation at the story he would have to tell his comrades.

Jimmy was at the head of the group of men, leading his pony and Ralph's. The others were also leading their ponies for a long refreshing drink at the spring. Ralph was greeted with a

burst of excited questions from his comrades. They had heard the shooting, and had hurried to the spring to his aid.

"Why didn't you come when Jimmy first went after you? You missed seeing a spiffy old scrap between that big cobby and the tiger," Ralph told them regretfully.

"Ten chances to one we'd not have seen it," differed Green. "You were in right, Boy. You were a secondary consideration to that pair of scrappers. But the big cobra, as you call it, would have hunted cover at sight of our gang. You've been lucky enough to see something I've always wanted to see—a hamadryad. They're the rarest snakes in the world. It's said there are not more than two or three left in the East. They live to be very old, but the variety has almost entirely died out. How large would you say it was?" Green was showing eager excitement over the big cobra.

"Fifteen feet, at least, and thick around as my arm." Ralph stretched forth an arm by way of comparison. Rapidly he recounted the details of the fight between the hamadryad and the tiger. "I'll bet the tiger is dead by now. Who wants to go with me to see if he dropped down in the thicket?"

"It's too bad we missed the fight, but a good thing we got here in time to keep you from plunging into trouble in the thicket," declared Mr. Edwards. "Even a snake-poisoned tiger

can fight like a demon. We must water the ponies and get back to camp. We have had a little excitement of our own since you went to the spring. Chuma ran down a brownie, hiding in the grass, watching us. The fellow saw him just in time enough to jump up and run."

"He knew the jungle, Sahib Ralph, better than I. So he managed to hide from me when I chased him," Chuma admitted with a crest-fallen gesture.

"Do you think he was a dacoit?" Ralph asked concernedly.

"Yes. I believe we are being trailed by dacoits. This fellow was not merely a native of this region. He was not watching us from curiosity." Chuma spoke with quiet conviction.

"They must be pretty foxy, then," put in Bret, "to have trailed us all the way up here. And we haven't seen a sign of 'em before to-day."

"That is the way of these," returned Chuma. "Like snakes they crawl in the grass until they are ready to strike." His voice rang with scorn.

"Gee whiz, according to that we may expect a shindig soon!" Jimmy gave his rifle a friendly pat. "I guess we can give good account of ourselves," he said valiantly.

"We must do more than that," Chuma asserted with tense earnestness. "We must all

the way outwit them, and at last escape them. Soon we shall be past the jungle and into the hills where there are good places among the rocks which we can hold against these jungle snakes."

"I'd say we had best trek all night, but it's not wise to try to travel the jungle in the dark. Besides the ponies need rest. We'll leave here at the first ray of daylight. For once we'll try getting along without a campfire. We'll have to take turns sleeping; two men may sleep a two-hour stretch, then they can relieve two more, and so on." Malcolm Edwards turned his pony away from the spring. "Come on, Boys," he said. "We must get busy with supper."

Presently the outfit sat down to crackers, coffee, tinned corn beef and their old stand-by, canned beans in tomato sauce. The meal was eaten by the last gleams of daylight. Afterward the campers seated themselves upon the ground sheet, conversing in low tones. At nine o'clock Bret and Green turned in for a two hours' sleep. They were awakened at eleven and Jimmy and Mr. Edwards went to sleep next. Ralph and Farley followed them as sleepers. Chuma refused to go to rest even for so short a time. All night he flitted about the camp, wide-awake and alertly listening for hostile sounds.

Morning dawned uneventfully for the jewel

hunters. They lost no time in getting on the trail again. It happened to lead them well below the thicket into which the tiger had sought cover after his losing battle with the hama-dryad. Nor were they much surprised when they came upon the dead tiger lying stiff and terrible in the flattened jungle grass. The broken-down reeds and plants in the dead tiger's immediate vicinity showed the final writhing struggle it had made as the poison raced through its veins. Ralph and Green skinned it and cached the skin until they should return.

All that day the adventurers pressed onward on their northern route without further sign of lurking brown enemies in the bushes. That night the same plan of watch was pursued, and again day came with nothing stirring that might mean trouble.

Toward twilight Chuma slipped away on a little scouting expedition of his own; a nightly custom with him.

"Maybe Chuma had the wrong idea about that brownie yesterday," Bret broke a brief silence that had fallen upon the group seated on the ground sheet. "He may have been nothing but a harmless native."

"Chuma doesn't get wrong impressions," Arthur Farley defended. "He knows what he sees, first time he sees it. I shouldn't be surprised if he——"

Crack, crack, crack! Three rifle shots barked in quick succession. Came a long-drawn scream of pain. It was echoed by another. Two of the ponies fell forward upon their knees, then dropped heavily over, rolling and kicking in a death struggle. Crack, crack, crack! Again the rifles of a hidden enemy spoke from a neighboring thicket of riotous vegetation. Two more ponies went down. Bullets began to whiz past the adventurers, now on their feet, their own rifles to their shoulders.

"Altogether; fire," coolly directed Mr. Edwards, pointing his rifle directly into the thicket.

The defenders' rifle fire crashed out as one shot. It must have taken effect. The firing in the thicket ceased abruptly. Two or three minutes went by, then a rifle spoke again from the thicket. A fifth pony stumbled, then rolled to the ground with a shattered leg. Green put a bullet through the disabled pony's brain, as a speedy end to its suffering.

"The fiends!" Farley cried out furiously. "It's the ponies they are out to kill. They think that without horses we'll be at their mercy. Oh, if there was only some place near that would shelter the poor beasts from their fire! Let 'em have it, as fast as you can reload and fire."

The rifle fire the adventurers poured steadily into the thicket for the next ten minutes had its

effect upon the enemy. They suddenly ceased shooting. The defenders continued to shower the thicket with bullets. No more shots answered their fire.

"Think they've gone?" muttered Ralph to Green.

"Nope; they are lying low. I'll say we put a few air-holes in some of 'em. They aren't very good shots, or some of us would have got nicked. They managed to do up five of the ponies, though," Green ended bitterly.

"Yes, and there's no shelter here for the three that are left." Malcolm Edwards had heard Green's remark. "Darkness will help us a little. We may be able to save the three. There are one or two good shots among the dacoits. Whoever shot the ponies, knew how to shoot."

"I'll never turn back, no matter how hard they come at me!" was Farley's vehement cry. "It's too much to expect you fellows to go on with me. It's I the dacoits are really dead against. They——"

"Oh, bosh!" scoffed Ralph. "I'm just as deep in this as you. Didn't I try to buy the ruby temple? Weren't we jumped on in the street in Calcutta? You had nothing to do with that scrap. Maybe this dacoit gang has found out we are jewel prospectors. I don't see how they could have, but they may have, just the same."

"We are going to stand by you to the limit, Farley," Malcolm Edwards made firm assurance. "We are almost in the ruby country now. We shall not turn back. If you——"

Crack crack, crack! From a point opposite that of the first volley of bullets the shooting broke out anew. With each spiteful report a pony screamed, staggered and rolled to the earth. The defenders answered the enemy fusillade, sending a raking fire into the green tangle which screened the brown marksmen. Their hail of bullets drew no answering fire. Three times they showered the thicket with bullets. Not a shot was returned.

"We certainly handed some little lead dose to those pony killers," Green was reloading his rifle with grim satisfaction. "We're good for a few more such scraps. Our time hasn't come yet."

"I can't see it coming, either," Ralph said valiantly. "We're almost through the jungle. Once we reach the hills maybe we can give these brown fiends the shake. We simply have to go on to the hills. It would be worse than foolish to turn back now. I wish we could find that man Heinrich's place. Didn't you say he had a stockade and a regular fortress in the jungle?"

"Yes. As nearly as I can tell we are somewhere near it. It would be great to find it, and him living there. It's hardly to be expected,

though. I'd welcome sight of his place," sighed Farley. "Chuma is late. I hope nothing bad has happened to him." The Englishman peered anxiously into the thickening darkness. Twilight was fast merging into the blackness of a moonless tropical night.

"I am here, my Sahib." As if in answer to Farley's worried words Chuma appeared noiselessly beside his master with the low-voiced salutation.

"Thank goodness!" the Englishman exclaimed softly. "We've been having a lively old gun scrap, Chuma, while you were away. Did you hear the firing? You were right about that brownie you saw in the grass. The dacoits are out for trouble. They shot our ponies, Boy. You know what that means. They are out to take us prisoners instead of bumping us off, pronto."

"Then I believe Lalla Dhon still lives and rules his own," was Chuma's instant reply. "Dacoits take no prisoners. Their way is to strike to the death, and plunder before the heart ceases to beat."

"I know it," Farley nodded. "It takes some robber chief to keep such wolves in line. I believe only Lalla Dhon could do it."

CHAPTER XIV

HEINRICH'S CLEARING

“**M**Y Sahibs, we must go away from here while it is dark,” were Chuma’s first words after hearing a more detailed account of the recent firing upon the camp. “I have been afraid all the way through the jungle that this trouble might come.”

“I’m with you, Chuma. We’d better cache the bulk of the supplies somewhere near here and hit up a pace north,” was Green’s energetic opinion. “How about leading us over the trail in the dark?”

“I can do it, Sahib Green. I can do more than that for you.” There was a note of triumph in Chuma’s utterance.

“What have you got up your sleeve?” Farley asked his man in a laughing tone. Nevertheless he was aware that Chuma was on the verge of making some sort of advantageous revelation.

“It is not up my sleeve. It is in the clearing,” Chuma returned vaguely.

“What’s that?” Farley asked in sharp surprise. “What——” A flash of belated com-

prehension seized him. "Chuma," he said, half incredulously, you don't mean—— Have you found it?"

"Yes, Sahib Arthur," Chuma returned happily. "You know I was gone from camp quite a long time. After I found it, it took me an hour to come back. I was wishing I might find it, when suddenly I saw light ahead among the bushes and trees. Then I saw more light and stepped out of the jungle onto a clearing. Far across the clearing I saw the stockade and Heinrich's house. It was not yet dark, so I could see the house plainly."

"Great Cæsar's ghost, but that's good news!" Farley broke out thankfully. "Heinrich must live there still, or there wouldn't be any clearing. Unless the green is kept cut, it soon goes back to jungle again."

"I had not time to go over to the house. It may be that Heinrich is still there. I saw no one. I was glad I had found this place. I came as soon as I could to tell you and guide you to it. It is safer for us to be within the stockade than in the jungle. If Lalla Dhon has nothing to do with leading the dacoits who have shot at us, these fellows will soon grow tired of dogging us, always with the risk of being killed."

"But, if Lalla Dhon happens to be frisking around the big woods, keeping a dah all ready

for us—what then?" Ralph demanded of Chuma.

"Then, Sahib Ralph, we must either kill him, or else he and his jackals will kill us," Chuma rejoined with cold-blooded composure.

"Safety first." Ralph grinned in the dark. He had not yet learned to reconcile Chuma's frequent calmly blood-thirsty remarks with the Hindoo's gentle manners and unswerving loyalty to his comrades. "Come on, gang, get busy and help me cache the stuff. I've thought of a dandy place for it. There's a peach of a big hollow in an old tree near the spring. There's room in it for our traps, and the rain can't spoil 'em."

Ralph's suggestion bore ready fruit. In the darkness, helped by judicious use of their flashlights, the bulk of the camp supplies and effects was gathered up and transferred to the temporary keeping of the huge hollow tree at the right of the camp. Half an hour's hard work and the adventurers were through with the task. They were now burdened with individual packs of supplies in addition to their rifles and well stuffed knapsacks.

Fortunately for them a sweet cool night wind sighed through the trees, fanning their hot faces as they presently took the trail. They stepped carefully along after Chuma, single file, in the blackness of the tropic night. Aside from regretting the inconvenience of being without

ponies, the adventurers missed the company of the faithful little ponies which had borne them so sturdily and well.

The raking fire the defenders had poured into the thicket, from whence had come the shots that had killed the ponies, had not been returned. As abruptly as it had begun, the shooting had ceased. Chuma, boldly unconcerned, prowled stealthily about the thickets on all sides of the camp. He presently rejoined his companions with the report that he had not found a single lurking enemy in the bush. The da-coits had evidently beaten a retreat for the time being.

Night trekking on debatable ground proved slow, indeed. None of the Adventure Boys ever forgot that particular night hike. Burdened as they were with luggage it became impossible to use their snake sticks. More than once they trod upon a wriggling snake, or felt one slip across their feet in the coarse grass. Once they all heard the unmistakable, spiteful hiss of a cobra, off at one side of a little jungle path they were following. A battery of flashlights instantly turned in the direction of the hiss revealed a good-sized cobra, risen half length from its coils, its ugly head swaying angrily.

Green slipped out of his pack straps and ran toward the deadly reptile, flash light in one hand, revolver in the other. He took quick aim when half a dozen feet from it and fired. Three

successive shots all but tore the hideous hooded head from the cobra's fiercely thrashing length. "I hoped it was the hamadryad," the sailor said disappointedly as he resumed his pack. "I'd like to have its skin. I'd present it to a museum."

"The tiger gave it a couple of clips," Ralph rejoined. "It probably went into the bush and died. Anyhow, we're miles away now from the place where that scrap was pulled off. You'll never see that snake again."

"Guess again. Snakes will travel hundreds of miles sometimes; especially the big fellows. It all depends on the jungle they happen to be in. I'm going to keep an eye out for the hamadryad."

"If you could capture it, alive, it would be a prize for a zoo," Arthur Farley remarked lightly.

"Nope. I wouldn't lug a dangerous snake like that around with me. I had more than enough of such jobs when I was working for a naturalist in Africa," was Green's emphatic reply. "A dead snake has it all over a live one for good behavior," he ended humorously.

It had taken Chuma an hour to return from the edge of Heinrich's clearing to the adventurers' camp. He had slipped through the jungle, unburdened, and with light, sandaled feet. As guide on his second trip to the clearing he had insisted upon carrying a share of the camp

outfit. It took the heavily laden travelers over three hours to make the night journey to the clearing. Accustomed to the nightly stir of the jungle tribe, out for its prey, they were not alarmed at sight of gleaming, baleful eyes and sound of savage, snarling cries.

At the edge of the clearing the weary trailers paused briefly to rest. Across the treeless space they could barely discern the blacker outline of a house. They could not see the stockade, though Chuma assured them it was there, its large heavy northern gate standing slightly open.

"One of us had best go over there first," Green proposed. "I will go. I'll be back pronto, and tell you how things are." He started away in the darkness before any of the others had time to expostulate against his going alone. Chuma slipped away after him without a word.

"Oh, come on!" urged Ralph, about to follow Chuma.

"No, we had better wait for them to go over and come back," Farley advocated. "Trust them to look out for themselves. We are too few in number to take risks."

Malcolm Edwards concurred with the Englishman in his opinion. The five trailers settled themselves in a row upon a convenient log to await the return of the two scouts. Almost an hour elapsed before they heard Green's

soft whistle in the darkness. A moment and he emerged from the black night shadows.

"It's all right," he greeted encouragingly. "Chuma's still over there. Nothing stirring that we could catch. Chuma did the house, and I did the compound. The sooner we get inside the house and shut the compound gate the better it will be for us. Chuma says we haven't seen the last of the dacoits; not by a long shot."

CHAPTER XV

THE WAY OF ESCAPE

CHUMA'S prediction regarding the dacoits was not idle. The day following the adventurers' night arrival at Heinrich's deserted house, the Hindoo slipped off on one of his stealthy scouting tours to return with the information that he had seen a band of at least twenty dacoits camped at the eastern edge of the jungle.

Thereafter Chuma made daily expeditions to the near-by jungle, returning each time with the bad news that the dacoit band was increasing in number. When on the third day after their arrival at the jungle house he reported that there must easily be close to a hundred dacoits encamped in the jungle east of the house, Malcolm Edwards decided that the greater safety of his flock lay in speedy flight.

"We shall have to make a get-away to-night after dark," he declared decisively to the Adventure Boys that afternoon as the four young men came together from their usual late afternoon patrol of the compound. "We can outdo them, shooting, but there are only a handful of us. We'd be lost if a hundred or so of those fiends swept down on the compound."

"Queer they haven't jumped us before now," Jimmy said speculatively.

"They've had their orders not to attack," Arthur Farley declared. "These brownies are being egged on by some one they dare not disobey. Left to themselves, they'd have tried to carve us up long ago and divide our stuff. We'd certainly have done what we could to hinder 'em, though," he ended grimly.

"We must outwit them," was Mr. Edwards's determined rejoinder. "We are not going to stay and be taken prisoners by this dacoit chief, whoever he may be. We must give the dacoits the slip somehow—and to-night. How did you find things about the compound, Boys?" he addressed the four patrollers generally. He and Arthur Farley had been engaged in going over and arranging their supplies before darkness descended. For two nights following their arrival they had not burned the camp lantern, but had depended upon their individual flashlights.

"Nothing stirring there," Ralph reported. "Say, I think it's strange about this clearing and the house, too. Everything around the house seems to be in good repair and the clearing is still fairly clear. I mean the jungle hasn't overgrown it again. That seems to show some one must have been living here recently."

"True," Farley nodded. "Heinrich may have lived here until recently. He was a young man when my grandfather was murdered by

the dacoits. If he has been here lately he can't be in the trapping business. I haven't seen any traps or pens for wild animals around the place. Strange Chuma and I completely missed this clearing when we were up here before."

"It lies between the hills and the jungle and the trees are so thick around it that it is really a secret clearing," commented Jimmy. "Bet-cha if you were to stand on the rocks to the north there, you'd hardly see this clearing at all. The jungle on three sides of it makes it look like a bad bit of the same blamed old snake patch."

"I invited Jimmy to take a walk up there with me the day after we struck this ranch. I guess you know why we didn't go," Bret said jokingly.

"You are going to take that walk to-night," Farley said with a flitting smile. "It's our one way of escape, so Chuma says. He has found a way to get us out of here. No; I don't know what it is. He hasn't told me yet what he's planned for a get-away." Farley thus answered a battery of inquiring glances. "I wish he'd come back. He's been in the jungle all afternoon." Farley cast an anxious glance toward the sun-scorched, yellow-green of the jungle.

"I never see him leaving or entering the compound. He fades out like a movie-still. How does he do it?" Ralph asked admiringly.

"He is a jungle wonder." Farley spoke with hearty affection.

"I'm going to watch for him, just to see if I can spot him getting back over the compound fence." Ralph went over to a set of loopholes in the cabin wall and began peering interestedly out of them upon the sun-blistered compound.

While he was engaged in watching assiduously for the return of Chuma over the compound fence, Chuma was much nearer than he knew.

"Huh!" Ralph accompanied the startled shout he gave with an awkward sideways leap. The boards of the floor under his feet had suddenly begun to move upward.

With the weight of his body removed the moving boards continued to rise. Ralph had been standing upon a trap door in the floor, pushed upward by a pair of strong shoulders. Next instant a tall, lithe form sprang up and out of the trap, landing on the floor beside it.

"Chuma! Well, what do you know about that?" Ralph pretended to collapse, then sat down flat on the floor. "How did you get back on the compound and down cellar without any one seeing you?"

"I told you Chuma was a wonder." Arthur Farley was smiling at his man with appreciative amusement.

"No, no, Sahib Arthur. You must not make

fun of me. I could not have left the compound and returned without having been seen by the wolves who prowl out there in the jungle. Thanks to Buddha the way has been prepared for us. Heinrich prepared it long ago, I believe. Perhaps at the last he found safety in it."

"I hope he did, if he needed it. You sprang a surprise upon us, Chuma. When did you discover there was a trap door in the floor? What is under us; a real cellar or just a dugout?" Mr. Edwards asked concernedly.

"It is less deep than a cellar, and deeper than a dugout," Chuma replied. "It has nothing in it but an old tiger cage, but behind this cage is the opening into a passage——"

"Wha-a-t?" Farley shouted, springing up from the bench on which he had been sitting. "A passage, did you say? Great guns! Heinrich surely had his wits about him when he planned this stronghold. Where does the passage lead, Boy? How long is it?"

"It is not more than three hundred feet long, but leads upward from the back of the compound to the rocks. It opens among the rocks, and few could find the opening. The passage is not higher than four feet, nor more than three feet wide. Heinrich must have dug the passage from his cellar and under his compound for more than two hundred feet. He must have first found the passage in the rocks

and followed it to its end. Then he had the idea that if he could dig a passage from his house to meet the one in the rocks he would then always have a secret means of escape should danger threaten him."

Chuma's logical theory of how the underground passage on Heinrich's property chanced to exist was received with a degree of acclamation which embarrassed the clever Hindoo. When the Adventure Boys' buoyant approval had subsided, Malcolm Edwards inquired of the brown man how and when he had made the opportunity to investigate the cellar, unobserved, and when he had discovered the trap.

"You remember the first day we came. I went through the one small window in one side of the cellar to see if snakes were there. While I was in the cellar I examined everything there. First I moved the tiger cage and found the opening into the passage. Then I wondered if there was no other way into the cellar from the room above. I searched, and found the little trap formed by a short length of the three boards." Chuma raised and lowered the trap for the benefit of his comrades.

"It's a mighty clever bit of carpenter work. Heinrich must have been a jack of all trades as well as a naturalist. He couldn't have felt very safe up here, or he wouldn't have provided such a get-away," was Green's opinion.

"He never dreamed of the good turn he was

going to do us when he dug that passage. Some job! I move we get ready to move into it at early twilight," proposed Ralph earnestly. "How about it up there among the rocks, Chuma? Were there any dacoits up there while you lay hidden at that end of the passage?"

"No; the dacoits are below this place. There are many of them scattered about in the jungle. They are waiting for the dark to come so that they may swarm the house like angry black bees. They intend to burn down the house and knife us all. I have lain hidden in the grass and heard some of them talk this afternoon," ended Chuma.

"We must leave here at the beginning of twilight," Mr. Edwards decreed forcefully. "After we leave the passage we will trek the rest of the night. We must put distance between our party and these dacoits. We must throw them entirely off our trail. Divide the supplies, Boys, and don't waste a crumb of any eatable. It may be a week before we shall be able to return to the cave where we cached our supplies."

"How is the passage floor, Chuma; fairly smooth going?" Arthur Farley asked the question. "We'll have to bend double, or else go through it on hands and knees."

"The old part of the passage has a stone floor, but the part Heinrich made has a sand-packed floor; very hard and quite smooth, my

Master. Sahib Edwards," Chuma turned to the jewel man, "shall we not eat an early supper and move the supplies through the passage before darkness falls? I will prepare the supper quickly."

"Thank you, Chuma. Ralph will help you with it. Better make it coffee, baked beans and salmon sandwiches to-night. They'll be easy to prepare."

"Watch our speed. We'll slam supper through pronto," Ralph boasted as he fished out two boxes of large size crackers from the general pack. The crackers were to furnish the backing for the sandwiches and made a fairly satisfactory substitute for bread. Soon he was busily opening salmon cans while Chuma lighted the small two-burner oilstove, which the Adventure Boys had found practical to tote along in their travels, and warmed up beans and made coffee.

While the pair worked at getting supper the others busied themselves with packing the supplies and equipment.

"Don't leave any valuables here," jokingly warned Arthur Farley. "You'll never get 'em again. This log house will go up in smoke to-night, sure as a gun."

"We should fidget. We won't be here to go up in smoke with it," Bret said cheerily. There was an undercurrent of wondering thankfulness in his voice, nevertheless. Very seriously

he added: "This passage business has me going. We were in about as tight a place here as a handful of fellows could be until Chuma Wiseguy got busy and dug up a way out."

"Yes; we were in bad. No mistake about it, Chuma Wiseguy deserves to be knighted for gallant service," Farley's eyes gleamed their gratitude as they came to rest upon the capable Hindoo.

The adventurers ate supper, sitting cross-legged in a circle on the floor of the large room which had been Heinrich's combination kitchen, bedroom and living room. It was nearing six-o'clock when they finished their picked-up repast and the tropical daylight was still bright in the great blue arch above them.

"Do you think we can make a safe get-away from the rocky end of the passage, Chuma?" was Green's concerned question, when, a little later, he and Ralph and Chuma descended through the trap to the cellar to make a trip through the newly found passage with a part of the expeditionary equipment and food supplies. "When these brown fiends begin to close in around the compound, some of them are likely to post themselves among the rocks above Heinrich's place on purpose to bump us off if we run in that direction."

"Sahib Green, there is no danger of this," Chuma's answer was vibrant with an odd assurance. "The rocky plain above here bears

the displeasure of Buddha. Why, I do not know. There is a curse upon it of the very old time. The dacoits are superstitious. They will not set their feet upon this little piece of table land. I heard them talking about the curse this afternoon. I am a true believer at the feet of Buddha. So I may walk on this plain without fear," the Hindoo ended reverently.

Within half an hour after the three young men disappeared into the cellar opening of the passage they were back again. Unhampered by bundles of supplies and heavily loaded knapsacks it would not take more than five minutes for them to make the underground journey to the rocks above the compound. The rocky end of the passage lay at least ten feet below the surface of the rock-strewn sand above it. A split in the solid rock had furnished a natural exit from the passage. It was a narrow split, not more than large enough to permit the passage through it of a slim, well-muscled man. A stout man could not possibly have essayed passage through it with success. A five-rung iron ladder, driven into the passage floor, and wired against one side of the little cavern, furnished an easy means of leaving the passage.

Directly above the rocky split a dwarfed bamboo tree grew, seemingly out of the rock itself. It trailed its ragged shots effectively over the vent in the rocks, completely masking the opening. Bret and Jimmy accompanied Chuma on

his second trip to the rocky terminus of the passage. Farley and Malcolm Edwards investigated it last. Presently the adventurers had transferred their belongings to the other end of the line. There had been space enough at the right of the little ladder in which to stack their packs and knapsacks.

"We might as well stay here until the last minute," Mr. Edwards said as he picked his rifle from the little arsenal standing in a corner of the room. "Once we reach the other end of the passage we shall be crowded into a rather small space, for a little while, at least."

"We ought to be at the other end of the line, ready to beat it for the hills, before twilight," advocated Green. "We want those stabbers to think we are in the house until they break in and find we aren't. They may not get hep to the passage for a while. Chuma is going to block the cellar end of it with a lot of Heinrich's old trash the last thing before he follows us."

As twilight began a slow approach the group of watchers at the cabin loopholes grew silent, speaking only occasionally. The tension of the hour was tightening. Thus far they had spied no signs of dacoits in the waving yellow-green of the jungle. They were there, nevertheless, as cruel and predatory as the tigers which ran the jungle with them and claimed their savage toll of human blood.

"They certainly are keeping well to cover." Green left one set of loopholes and crossed the big room to another set on the east side of the house. "Hark! Hear that!" He began an eager peering forth at the east side set of loopholes. "That's a big bull elephant; mad as thunder, too. He's not far from here, either." The huge animal's screaming war cry filled the still evening air.

"If we see him coming in this direction we had best take to the passage," counseled Arthur Farley. "That big boy is sore. He's trumpeting his rage, but he's probably ripping up a section of jungle to boot. If this house happens to be in his way—well—it won't be in it long. A peeved elephant is some wrecker."

"Oh-h-h! Quick; look!" Bret had suddenly sent up a ringing alarm. He had been watching the west side of the jungle and was on the point of calling out that he saw two natives dodging in and out of the jungle edge when something remarkable began to happen.

Instead of only two brown men, out of the ragged jungle screen broke a crowd of half naked brown forms. On came the brown runners, fleeing madly across the clearing and uttering wild shrill frightened cries. The fading daylight caught the flashing steel of their great knives. Only a few of the panic-stricken mob were carrying rifles.

They were running for their lives. Their

lives, however, were forfeit to the sweeping, devastating force which pursued them. They had lain fiercely in wait, until the dropping of evening, to "wipe out the hated white men." Retribution, swift and terrible, had now overtaken the dacoits.

Out of the jungle and across the open space below the compound dashed the largest elephant the Adventure Boys had ever seen. His wild trumpeting awoke the drowsy twilight echoes and was answered from left to right by the shrill screams of other elephants.

"To the passage!" shouted Malcolm Edwards. "It is our best hope of safety. There is a big elephant herd behind the elephant in the lead."

"The great herd. Oh, Chang, but you're some beastie!" exclaimed Arthur Farley. "I was told two years ago that there was a whopping old elephant herd running in Upper Burma." Farley had already opened the trap in the floor.

The adventurers made quick work of seeking the safety of the passage. Once crouching in its narrow confines, they sat waiting for—they hardly knew what. Should the herd demolish the house and tear up the earth directly over the passage, would the weight of the racing animals cause the underground passage to cave in? They could not say. They could only hope it would not.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STING OF THE HAMADRYAD

“**W**HAT’S stirring?” Ralph demanded after what seemed an interminable stretch of suspense, during which nothing happened. “I mean, what else besides Chang.”

“I’m going up to see,” announced Green, who had been the last man to enter the passage from the cellar. He was now the nearest man to the cellar opening. He promptly disappeared, but returned very shortly, all excitement.

“Come on up,” he cried, beckoning. “You’ll never see such a sight again. I only hope you aren’t too late to see it. You needn’t be afraid they’ll rough-house this place. They are past it now and breaking into the jungle again.”

Green had come up and out of the cellar just in time to see the clearing below the compound alive with the gray bulk of elephants. The huge beasts had come from the north side of the jungle, driving the fear-frenzied dacoits before them until they overtook the brown men and trampled them into the earth with their

great, crushing feet. They caught the south-east corner of the compound fence in their mad stampede, crashing through it and snapping the fenceboards like pipestems.

By the time the others had come up through the trap again and into the main room of Heinrich's house, the great herd of Chang (elephants) had swept on, leaving devastation in its wake. There were uprooted trees and deep hollows in the ground, immense heaps of bushes, jerked up by the roots, and strewn upon the clearing were the dead bodies of the unlucky dacoits who were crushed beneath the stamped-ing feet of the huge animals. Disaster, sudden and grim, had indeed attended the progress across Upper Burma of the great herd.

"One beautiful feature about Chang's little picnic crowd is that it won't come back," Green said with grim satisfaction as the sounds of furious trampling feet, pounding the earth, began to grow fainter. "When Chang starts, they keep on going."

"If they had included the house in that Marathon they were doing they'd have smashed it flat," Jimmy said with a wise nod. "I know another little picnic crowd, too, that won't be coming around here to-night. The dacoits will have something else to do besides trying to wipe out this aggregation. I mean, the few brownies that are left. The big herd must have put out a lot of them."

"It caught them unawares. They weren't expecting trouble from the jungle. They were lying low at the edge of it until it grew dark enough for them to rush us. The few dacoits that survived won't wait for morning to hunt their dead. Instead, they'll put distance between them and Heinrich's clearing. They're more than ever positive by this time that the condemnation of Buddha rests on Heinrich's clearing, too," Arthur Farley said. He went over to the set of loopholes at the east end of the room and took a careful observation.

"We'll have put a night's steady tramp between us and Heinrich's house before the few dacoits Chang missed pulverizing begin to try to pick up our trail again," was his confident prognostication.

Malcolm Edwards had been taking an observation on the west side of the room. He turned from the loopholes with an air of cheerful energy. "We had best leave here now," he said. "With the moon full we ought to cover several miles of territory before midnight. Keep your snake sticks at ready, Boys, Chuma says there is a good trail over the rocks and up into the hills."

"Well, here goes!" Farley bent down and applied the proper pressure for releasing the mechanism of the little floor trap. Next instant the Englishman was swinging his long legs into the cellar, dropping lightly to the cellar floor.

One after another, the adventurers followed Farley into the cellar. Chuma was last of the procession. He pulled the little wooden trap down smartly, and a tiny click told of a locking mechanism. Chuma knew how to manipulate it. It had taken time for him to discover it from the cellar side of the trap. Once found, it had promised a safe reëntrance into Heinrich's deserted home in an emergency.

Coming to the rock end of the passage, which formed a small natural cavern underneath the split overhanging rock, the company of silent jewel hunters paused to listen for danger sounds. Chuma, clad only in a loin cloth, flitted up the tiny ladder on noiseless sandaled feet and disappeared into a thicket with the stealthy tactics of a true jungle denizen.

It was over an hour before he returned, popping out of the thicket as suddenly as he had disappeared into it.

"All is well, my Sahibs," he greeted softly as he swung down into the cavern, landing lightly in the center of the group of huddled forms. "Nothing bad is to be seen; nothing at all. I have been a little way up the trail. It winds in and out among the rocks and sometimes two can walk upon it, side by side. The hills are full of sandy pockets, and such sand may be byon (ruby-bearing soil). I have seen this by the light of the moon. I have seen two wolves and heard a tiger cough, and heard a

pack of dhiel (wild dogs) howling far off. But I have not seen any sign of the pack of dacoit dogs which hoped to snap at our throats. Buddha is kind, and ever just to the true Believers. He has smoothed the way for us."

"We are glad to have your prayers, Chuma, and the favor of Buddha." Arthur Farley spoke with due reverence in his tones. He knew nothing would please his devoted servant more than such a tribute to a devout worshiper at the shrine of Buddha.

"*You* are the bright evening star of this outfit, Chuma," Ralph declared breezily. "That is—of course, well—Buddha is all right, you know, but——" Ralph came to a sudden floundering stop. He was not certain how Chuma might receive such a remark as he had made about Buddha.

Green smiled in the dark and went to Ralph's aid. "It's ten minutes of eight," he said, his flashlight playing upon the dial of his wrist watch. It won't be any darker, later, than it is now. We had best start, hadn't we?"

"I wonder if we can be near the point where the ruby convoy disappeared," Farley said musingly. "It couldn't have been very far away from Heinrich's place. Heinrich told my mother that it took two days for his two native boys to bring Grandy, wounded, from the jungle to his house. They wouldn't cover many

miles in a day with a burden like that to carry. What little of the up-trail Chuma saw while he was scouting tallies with the description of the region that my Grandy gave my parents."

"If we could only be sure we were going in the right direction," Mr. Edwards said, frowning. "I believe there may be one chance in a million of finding the convoy strong box of rubies. But the prospect that yielded those rubies! That's a different matter. If we find plenty of byon up the trail there, we'll stop and dig into it, dacoits, or no dacoits. While it is true we've slipped away from what promised to be a fight for our lives with them, we are not going to be driven away from any good prospect we may find, by these brown fiends."

"We haven't seen the last of them yet," Green predicted. "Some secret enemy of ours rallied those brownies against us at Heinrich's place."

"The whole thing goes back to Ganga Singh, and the temple," was Ralph's positive opinion. "Just the same, there's a big robber chief behind this business, too, who has it in for us because we won in that street fight."

"Dada Naib may have had a hand in it, too," Green commented. "He knew the wild man we ran in after the fight. Possibly he knows the big robber chief that we nicknamed the Robber Rajah. There's another, deeper reason than personal spite for what the dacoits got ready

to do to us at Heinrich's. They don't want us up here. It rests with us to learn why."

"Well, we are here, and we are going to stay in Upper Burma till we fill a strong box of our own with rubies," Bret prophesied buoyantly.

"Then let's be on our way to doing it. You don't happen to have the strong box with you, do you?" Ralph inquired teasingly.

"You'll find out if you come too near to me," threatened Bret, chuckling.

Quickly, one by one, the jewel hunters gained the trail which ran along at one side of the hidden natural cavern. Though the day had been hot the tropical night breeze fluttered the leaves and cooled the heated atmosphere. The moon was now on the increase, making the rock-strewn trail fairly plain. It wound around curious rock formations and drifted sand heaps, at times dipping down into bushy thickets. As Chuma had said, it was a well-defined trail, so hard packed as to convey the impression of having been frequently trod.

"It wouldn't surprise me if, before long, we came slam-bang up against one of those big shrines to Buddha. That might account for the trail being so plain." Green made this conjecture while the tired hikers were taking a ten minutes' rest. It was now after two in the morning, and the steady pace they had kept up since

their start from the rocky passage had begun to tell on them slightly.

The adventurers had, since their start shortly after eight o'clock, traveled at the rate of almost four miles an hour with a ten minutes' hourly stop for rest. They had decided to go on until daybreak, then stop and cook breakfast. The further they went the more confident had Malcolm Edwards become that they were in a good ruby prospecting region. He had decided to stop and do some prospecting as soon as daylight should appear. Since he and his comrades had given the dacoits the slip so completely he had no immediate fear of another such horde of brown men as had hemmed them in at Heinrich's log house.

"I shouldn't mind coming slam-bang against daylight and having a feed and a snooze," complained Bret, yawning.

"It will be light by four. I'd like to do eight miles more before we call a halt for breakfast," answered the older man.

It was shortly after four o'clock and the east was growing faintly pink when Green, forging along beside Chuma, in a wide bit of trail, gave a triumphant shout and pointed at something up a steep hillside a few yards ahead and at the left of the trail.

"There it is! What did I tell you?" he called out.

Chuma had already bounded up the steep hill-

side and was pausing before a curious man-sized image, squatting cross-legged upon a block of grayish-green stone. Below the block of stone was a platform of stone perhaps four feet square which extended out to meet a rocky formation upon which the little platform rested. Ralph, Bret and Green followed him up the steep.

"This is not a Buddha," he cried, motioning toward the image. "It is an old Hindoo idol. See; it has a gold band around its head and there are a few jewels in the band. Buddha wears no jewels. His followers worship him for his goodness."

"It has an ugly old mug, hasn't it?" Ralph gave the idol an amused once-over. "It's a wonder the dacoits haven't lifted his head-piece."

"It is very ill fortune to rob any idol or to meddle with that which belongs to a god," Chuma replied gravely. "Even the dacoits are afraid to do such deeds."

"*Some face.*" Bret stood looking at the image with a broad grin. The ancient god's weather-beaten features were set in a kind of sinister smile which gave it a terrifying aspect.

"I thought you were the hearty who was growling about feeding and snoozing," Farley called jokingly to Bret. "Come on down. We need you to help get breakfast."

"I'll say you do," Bret flung back. He flapped a hand from his wrist at the ugly-visaged Hindoo god. "Ta-ta, Boy. See you again later." He turned and went slipping and sliding down the trail to where the others had paused when Green had pointed out the idol.

"The first thing to do is to find water," Mr. Edwards said as Green and Ralph joined their comrades. Chuma was still poking about the rocky platform. "There should be plenty of springs among so many rocks. We must locate a spring and make camp there."

They found it finally after having traveled around the base of the steep hillside that harbored the Hindoo god. It was a clear cold little spring of water, bursting from the rock and the travelers drank long and deeply of it.

"Let's have a bang-up breakfast," Ralph proposed recklessly. "I'm hungry as the dickens. I'm going to make biscuits. Some of the rest of you can make coffee and fry bacon. I've a can of tomatoes and a whopping big can of peaches in my pack. We'll have them, too. I'm going to be reckless and feed you fellows well for once, even though we are short of grub. Chuma says he can show us a short cut over the hills to where we have our supplies cached."

Ralph began an industrious hunt for a flat smooth stone of fair size on which to mix his biscuit dough. He found one, washed it in the spring and proceeded to biscuit-making with

the air of a chef. While he was busy with the dough Green made coffee and fried bacon while Jimmy opened the cans of peaches and tomatoes. When Chuma finally joined the camp-makers after his curious inspection of the Hindoo god he contributed a package of rice cakes to the feast which were received with noisy acclamation. The hungry adventurers plumped down on the rough ground around their early morning spread and attacked it with zest.

"Oh, gee! This feed certainly tastes good!" Jimmy exclaimed as he bit into his fourth biscuit, lavishly spread with stewed tomatoes.

"Does it?" Ralph was helping himself to bacon with equal enthusiasm. "That's because I made the biscuits," he added modestly.

"Um-m-m. We'll have to give you credit for once," Green laughingly conceded.

"Betcha you will," Ralph came back at him. "You know all right enough that——"

"Ha-a-a-a-a-a!" A wild shrill cry suddenly rent the still morning air which brought the jewel hunters to their feet in an instant. The shrill call was one of fright, emanating, seemingly, from the lips of a man in deadly peril.

"Around the base of the hill. It's coming from there," cried Stanley Green, raising an arm toward the other side of the hill. He and Chuma set off neck and neck toward the curving base of the hill. The others followed, run-

ning only a few steps behind the racing pair.

"Ha-a-a-a!" Green and Chuma had rounded the curve now and were looking up at the point where stood the ancient Hindoo god, staring stonily out over its platform. There were two men on the platform now engaged in deadly struggle. The taller of the two poised an upraised dah, aimed for his antagonist's heart.

"Ganga Singh!" The shout Green set up echoed and reëchoed on the newness of the morning. He had recognized in one of the combatants the bleak-faced proprietor of the Calcutta bazaar.

Simultaneously with Green's recognition of the bazaar keeper something happened. Ganga Singh suddenly let go his hold on his enemy and dropped to his knees. Came a triumphant cry from his antagonist, big and powerful; a formidable foe. It changed to a roar of alarm as the big man felt the stone platform rock and sway beneath his feet. He made a cat-like spring off it, just as it began to swing into the black void it covered like a bucket into a well. As he jumped he made a wild snatch at Ganga Singh. Too late. The swinging stone had already swept the bazaar keeper into the black void. A moment, in which the running men paused in sheer amazement in their race up-hill.

It was in that moment something else happened. As the enemy of Ganga Singh made a

frantic grab at him, out from behind the body of the Hindoo god darted a venomous, triangular head. Coil upon coil, a great serpent threw itself forward, striking with insensate fury. Before the antagonist of Singh could dodge the fangs of that wicked distended head, it had buried them in his face, then drawn back for a fresh deadly attack.

"The hamadryad!" yelled Green at the top of his voice. "Blest if I don't believe it's the same snake we saw have the fight with the tiger. Oh, let me get it. Nope, I don't want it as a live specimen. I'm going to take a shot at it. It must have a hanging-out place behind the old god and when the stone platform moved it disturbed Mr. Hammy. I never expected to see a hamadryad. Now I've seen one."

"That Hindoo is done for," Arthur Farley cried as the big man strove to regain his balance, then fell forward on his face across the stone platform.

"We'll do what we can for him." The jewel hunters had now surrounded the stricken man. Malcolm Edwards was hunting in his knapsack for an antidote to snake poisoning which each member of the expedition kept in his emergency kit. He found it, then bent to raise the stricken Oriental to a sitting position.

Supported by strong arms the Hindoo imperiously waved off Mr. Edwards. "No, no," he repeated huskily; "it is the sting of the hama-

dryad." He raised a hand weakly to his fanged cheek. It had already begun to swell and discolor, so quickly does the deadly poison do its work.

"I had rather die than lose it, Englishman." He cast a baleful glance at Farley. "Ganga Singh has it, but he will die. My dah struck home. You will never have it. Oh-h-h-h!" The torment of the poison now gripped him. "How I—hate—you," he snarled. His swollen lip drew back over white pointed teeth. "How—I—hate—you, En—glish—man. I—Lalla—Dhon—have said—it." He tried to fight off the convulsion which now seized him. It overcame him. He tore himself loose from the supporting arms of the Adventure Boys with a long writhing shudder, then dropped heavily back upon the stone platform which had swung into place following Ganga Singh's disappearance into the square opening.

"Great guns!" Arthur Farley shouted the words in his amazement. "And *this* was Lalla Dhon!"

"He was some one besides Lalla Dhon, too." It was Jimmy who spoke. He was staring shrewdly down upon the dark swollen face of the Oriental. "He was the Robber Rajah."

CHAPTER XVII

BENEATH THE SWAYING STONE

A BURST of exclamation went up from the group which ringed the swaying stone. "By gracious, you're a wise little scout, James," Ralph lightly commended. Raising his voice, he yelled: "Hey, Greenie. Come down here. Let the blamed old snake go. It's too foxy for you. You missed it, first shot. You'll not get another chance at it. It's hunted cover."

With Green's shouted belief regarding the hamadryad he had fired his revolver twice in rapid succession at the whirling dark coils above the platform. Like a flash the hamadryad had whipped itself about and glided off up the steep with Green in hot pursuit. Nor did his comrades dare risk a shot at it for fear of hitting him. At the top of the little steep, he had lost sight of the serpent. He was standing still for a moment, trying to pick it up again when Ralph's voice floated up to him.

"Don't say a word," Ralph cautioned as Green drew nearer the group. "I want to see if Green will recognize this Hindoo as the R. R."

Green joined the others full of excitement about the hamadryad which had escaped him. "That confounded snake has the brains of a man," he declared, forgetting for the moment the still form on the platform. "It can move faster than a six-foot cobra, and it's twice the size of one. Only the black mamba can beat it for speed. But not for poison. This Oriental must have passed out pronto. He got a faceful of fangs."

The sailor glanced down at the dead robber. Something about the Hindoo's face and form caught his attention. He stared hard at the dead man, then said in a half-wondering tone: "By Jinks, it's Whiskers."

"Huh!" Ralph gave a pleased little crow. "Go to the head of the class. You guessed right the first time. Jimmy guessed that he was the Robber Rajah. Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other, you know. You are both stars."

"He was certainly better-looking as the Robber Rajah than as Whiskers," Bret said.

For a moment a curious little silence fell upon the group of adventurers as they stood looking down at the dead Rajah. In life he had indeed been handsome, in the sleek, lithe way of a jungle tiger. His small black mustache and goatee had set off his dark aquiline features and brought out further the magnificence of his great dark flashing eyes. His

white turban in which glowed several rubies and emeralds had now fallen off and his thick black hair, lightly streaked with gray, had dropped in a great wave over his high forehead. Now swollen and discolored, his features still bore the stamp of haughty arrogance, which had also characterized his walk and bearing.

"We had best move him off the platform and try to get at Singh." Malcolm Edwards finally broke the silent little interval which the revelation of the robber's identity had brought about. "I am not sure that this robber chief landed a knife thrust in Singh's body. Singh evidently worked the mechanism of that swaying stone when he went down on his knees. Perhaps Singh managed to dodge the thrust and is hiding in the cavity under the platform. Since he seemed to know the way to set the stone in motion, he must have known what lay beneath it."

"He ought to be able to hear us if we shout his name altogether," Farley suggested.

"Gather around the platform, boys," Mr. Edwards directed. "When I raise my right arm, shout altogether: 'Hello, Singh.' Shout it three times running, then stop and listen for a reply."

"He's a stubborn old clam. Just like him not to answer," predicted Jimmy.

"We'll try to find the mechanism of the swaying stone whether he answers our call or

not," declared Malcolm Edwards with decision. "If we can't find it we'll try to pry up this platform."

"The platform began to move when Singh dropped down on his knees. He fell right there." Jimmy leaned forward, indicating a point of the platform directly opposite that occupied by the Hindoo god.

"Let's give Singh a hail, then I'm going to have a try at the puzzle. Swing your right arm, Oom Bossy Edwards, and we'll make some noise." Green cast a laughing, expectant glance toward the jewel man.

Up went the older man's arm. The ringing shout that ascended set the wild echoes flying. Three times it rose and fell upon the morning air. Followed sudden silence as the adventurers paused to listen. They could hear nothing but the gurgle of the water in the little rocky spring, the rustle of leaves and the soft notes of birds, singing their morning songs.

The adventurers shouted Singh's name again after a brief interval. Still no answering call was heard. They had called a third time, then dropped into momentary silence when they caught the sound of a feeble moaning cry. As nearly as they could judge it seemed to emanate from underneath the stone platform.

"That was Singh," he answered. Green plumped down flat on the stone platform. Placing his face close to the stone, he yelled

lustily: "Ho, Singh! Can you hear me?" After he had repeated the call two or three times he had the satisfaction of hearing a faint "Yes" to his question.

"Ask him if he is hurt," directed Mr. Edwards.

Green complied with the direction. It was longer this time before an answer came. Finally he heard a wavering "Yes."

"The Rajah got in a knife thrust after all," Green said. "By the time we pry up that platform we may find a dead Singh down below."

"Let me see if I can fall down on it the way Singh fell. Maybe I can start the blamed thing moving," begged Jimmy. "I can remember just exactly how he made that fall."

"Go ahead." Green sprang up from the platform to make room for Jimmy.

Jimmy made a lively leap onto the platform, intending to drop quickly to his knees on the square stone. His feet had scarcely touched the side of the platform nearest the Hindoo idol when it began to drop under his feet. Swaying gently, the other side of the platform had now begun to rise. It continued to tilt and sway until it stood upright exactly across the center of a black void which the platform had lately covered.

"Ha-a-a-a!" Jimmy vented a loud yell as he felt himself being swept off the swaying platform and down into black darkness.

"Catch it before it swings back into place," shouted Farley. He cast a hasty glance about him in search of something with which to prop the platform and render it temporarily immovable.

Chuma had already dragged forward a small log. He hurriedly slid it across one side of the cavity so that it fitted precisely into the space between the idol and the swaying stone. The stone stopped moving just as a wildly interested group closed in about it.

"Hello, Jimmy!" hallooed Ralph. "Are you all right down there?"

"Yep. Better come down, all of you. There's a big cave here," Jimmy called up with his usual cheerfulness. "Singh says he wants to tell Farley and Ralph something."

"Is he badly wounded?" questioned Mr. Edwards.

"Ye-e-s-s, I—am—dy-ing, Sahib," came weakly from the East Indian.

"How deep is this hole, Jimmy?" called Green.

"Maybe fifteen feet; maybe not more than ten. Secure the rope ladder and come down on that. Then you can get up out of here O.K., when you're ready," was Jimmy's prompt advice.

The rope ladder was among the few important effects which the adventurers considered necessary to carry even when hiking. It was a

light but strong little contrivance which could be made into a compact bundle and which the Adventure Boys took turns carrying.

Ralph had already begun to undo the ladder when Jimmy advised its use. Chuma meanwhile busied himself with pounding two short stakes into the ground at one side of the yawning cavity to which the ladder could be fastened.

"Hi, you, Jimmy; how does it feel to be dumped into a hole? Any snakes down there?" Stooping, Bret balanced himself on the edge of the hole and hailed Jimmy.

"Get Ralph to throw you down, then you'll know how it feels," Jimmy retorted. His tone changed to serious as he called up to Arthur Farley. "You'd better come first, Farley, then Ralph, then Mr. Edwards after him. Singh is almost done for, I believe." He spoke the last sentence in Spanish.

Farley obeyed Jimmy's suggestion. In an instant he was down the little ladder and standing beside Jimmy in a roomy cavern under the very hillside over which the Hindoo god had stood guard for so long. Ralph and Mr. Edwards followed Farley's descent immediately. After them came Bret and Green. Chuma refused to descend. He preferred mounting guard above, always on the alert for possible danger to his "sahibs."

As Green's feet struck the hard-packed floor

of the hillside cave a broad beam of light flashed about the dark cavern. Green had brought the camp flashlight. A quick once-around and he had trained it upon the recumbent form of the bazaar proprietor. Singh lay limply back, his turbaned head resting against an oblong object, covered by a dark cloak. He opened his half-closed eyes wider as the light struck them. They came to rest on Arthur Farley.

"It is—yours, Sahib," he said weakly. Sheer effort of will steadied his voice as he continued: "His father gave it to your uncle. Lalla is the one who killed your uncle and stole the Temple of Light from his belt. He kept it for long years. Then his robber's gold gave out and he brought the temple to me to sell."

"Where is the temple now, Singh?" Farley's tones vibrated with eagerness.

"It is—it is——" the wounded man began. Weakness again overcame him, momentarily.

"You are badly wounded, Singh. Don't try to tell me anything more just now about the temple. Let me dress your wound." Humanity conquered Farley's desire to learn the truth about the ruby temple. He rummaged in his first aid packet for a roll of gauze bandaging. Then he cut away the folds of the Oriental's robe from his left breast. Lalla Dhon's dah had inflicted a deep wound directly over Singh's heart and through the lungs. He and Green bandaged the wounded man gently and

skillfully. It was only a matter of minutes now with Ganga Singh.

Singh lay still for a little, eyes closed. Presently he opened them, stared fixedly at Farley and tried to sit up. "Never let Lalla have the temple," he said, his faint tones gathering force. "I told him the young sahib had bought it and paid me for it. I gave him my own money; three thousand pounds. He was angry that I sold it not at a better price. He thought the young sahib had it and sent his men into the streets to kill him and get back the temple."

"Now we are getting down to brass tacks," Green muttered to Malcolm Edwards.

The latter nodded, then asked Singh gently: "Did not Lalla Dhon follow us to the Arlington that night and hide in the apartment across the hall?"

"Sahib, it was in your apartment he hid. There is a hiding place between the walls. Once he lived there under the name of Rhan Behur."

"*Good night!*" came simultaneously from Bret and Jimmy.

"Is Dada Naib a dacoit?" It was Ralph who put the abrupt question.

"He is no more. He was a dacoit. Another dacoit stabbed him. He was not so bad. He came in the night and told me of Lalla's rage because his men could not find the temple, or kill you Americans. Lao Bhar, who was caught

and put in prison, told him all. I knew I could not stay in the city. I must go away quickly and take the temple with me, for Dhon would find out that I still had it. Then he would kill me. I would have delivered it to you, young Sahib, late that night, and asked you to send me the three thousand pounds to a place I should name, but I did not dare. Lalla Dhon was watching me. When he found that you did not have the temple, he was in a rage. Then, Dada Naib, who was my friend, ran to me with the word. I fled in the night with the temple. I knew—I—I knew—there—was but—one place—to—hide—it.”

Ganga Singh's little spurt of strength, which had enabled him to tell the adventurers such unexpected news of the temple, was fast ebbing now. Again his eyes closed. The group of men gathered about the wounded man were strangely silent. Anxious though they were to learn from Singh the whereabouts of the ruby temple in the near presence of death they were mute.

“Lalla—has—brought me—death.” Singh finally opened his eyes and spoke again. “I—could—not—escape—him. Beware of him. He—must—have—hidden—himself—after—he—struck me. He—will—trail—you—like—the—tiger. He—has—only—hate—for the—white sahibs.”

“He is dead, Singh. He died of the bite of

a hamadryad," Green said gently to the dying Oriental. "It stung him in the face directly after he stabbed you with the dah."

"Thanks—be—to Buddha—who has—willed — evil — to — evil — and — good — to — good," Singh faintly responded. "The—temple—is—the temple—is—" His voice trailed into silence.

"*Where* is the temple, Singh?" Arthur Farley could not refrain from repeating the question. He could not bear to think of being so near the information he sought regarding the temple without making an effort to gain it. He held his breath as he waited in suspense for an answer.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MYSTERY OF GANGA SINGH

“**I**—is—here—Sahib Far—ley. Take—away—the—cloak. None—but—I—knew—it—was—here. I—have—not—taken—any—rubies—from—it. I—helped—the old—Sahib Far—ley—hide—the—strong box.”

“What do you mean, Singh?” In his wonderment Farley forgot that he was questioning a dying man. His voice sounded hoarse and strange as he asked: “What were you to my grandfather, Wynne Farley?”

“His—wallah—Sahib. I—was—with—him—for—long—time. Water—give—me—water—Sahib. It—will—give—me—strength. I have—much—yet—to tell.”

Malcolm Edwards was already holding his water bottle to the dying Hindoo's lips. He raised the brown man a little higher, supporting him with his right arm while Singh drank. Afterward the Hindoo was silent for several minutes. The circle of sober-faced men about him waited, wonderingly. Every pair of eyes was bent upon the recumbent figure of the

bazaar owner who had just made such a surprising statement.

"I—was—Gulo—his man. We—went—in—the—night—to hide—the—rubies. I—showed—him—the way. I—knew—the secret—of—the—sway—ing—stone. It—is—written—in—the—Sa—hib General's—little—book. You—will—see—when—the—box—is—open."

"Who murdered my grandfather, Singh, and who stole the temple?" Farley's questions vibrated with stern emotion. "How did the temple happen to come into your hands as a curio?"

The strength that sometimes comes just before death seemed to rise in Ganga Singh and he began to speak rapidly.

"Lalla Dhon stabbed the Sahib General. It was late in the morning. I went before the Sahib General to look for danger. While I was away from him came Lalla and many more dacoits. They fell upon the Sahib General and his men and knifed them all. Then they took the bodies of these and dropped them into a deep hole that had once been a tiger trap. I hid in the bushes and saw Lalla take the temple from my Sahib's belt. Then he laughed and said, 'I hope you suffer before you die, pig of an Englishman. Because of you my father hated me.' He did not throw the Sahib General into the hole. He went away and left him. I watched until the dacoits had gone, then ran to my Sahib. I knew he would soon die. I took

the black leather book from his pocket. Lalla left it there. He thought it was nothing. He was angry because he found not the box of rubies. I stayed beside my Sahib for long time. At last I thought he was dead. Then I heard voices and thought Lalla was coming. It was not Lalla but two Hindoos—wallahs. They took my Sahib away on a litter they made. I was afraid to be seen. They would have believed me a dacoit. But I was never a dacoit. My Sahib General never knew I was the oldest son of Ashim Dhon. My father blamed me in my youth for that which Lalla had done—stealing his gold. I left my father's house forever."

"Rest, Singh," Arthur Farley urged. "You must not try—"

"No, Sahib Farley. I must speak now. I will soon have passed out." The Hindoo was breathing more spasmodically now. "I saw not Lalla again for many years. Then he brought me the temple to sell for him. He made the threat to kill me and burn my bazaar if I should sell it to you. I was afraid of him. But this was wrong. Buddha, forgive my weakness. Ah-h-h-h! The pain." The wounded Hindoo made a feeble attempt to clutch at his heart. He raised himself a little and a tide of crimson poured from his wound, dyeing his white linen robe. He groaned again, deeply. Long violent shudders swept his spare frame. Conscious-

ness then left him, taking life with it. Ganga Singh lay still.

"He has passed out," Green said quietly, after listening for a minute or two with an ear against the motionless Oriental's heart.

"A strange fellow. He has told us a strange story. He was weak morally, when he should have been strong. He was thoroughly loyal to your grandfather, Farley, yet he was not morally strong enough to stand out against that robber brother of his." Malcolm Edwards was looking compassionately down at the dead man.

"And to think he was Ashim Dhon's oldest son!" Farley exclaimed softly.

"Well, the Robber Rajah burned down Singh's bazaar, and killed Singh, just as he had threatened," Bret commented soberly. "He got what was coming to him, though."

Presently, after the adventurers had spoken a little further of the Hindoo they had known as Ganga Singh, Green said:

"Farley, shall I lift the black cloak from whatever it is covering?" He smiled significantly at the dumbfounded Englishman.

"Do—please, Green. I'm simply dashed at the whole affair. I can hardly make myself believe—still—dying men do not lie." Farley was staring at the black cloak in Green's hands without seeing it. There was a curiously dazed expression in his gray eyes. A welling murmur

from his companions brought him to an immediate recollection of what was going on. He was now staring seeingly at the stout steel box which Green had just uncovered. "Can it be?" he murmured. "By George—I believe it is—Grandy's strong box. Singh said it still holds the rubies. And Singh was Gulo! That's the most amazing thing of all to me. I remember hearing Grandy mention Gulo when he visited us, even though I was only a kiddie."

As he spoke he received the box from Green. It was of fine blue steel, two feet long, a foot and a half wide, and one foot deep. It was reinforced by steel bands and had a double lock. A key stood in each lock.

"Is the box locked?" Ralph was leaning forward, amazement written large on his youthful features. "If the temple is in it, then Singh surely put it there."

Farley made an ineffectual effort to raise the lid of the steel box. "Locked," he said, then began turning first one then the other key. When he tried again to raise the lid, it yielded to his strong fingers. He threw it back.

"Oh-h-h-h!" he gave a sudden gasp that was echoed by his comrades. Staring down into the box, they were seeing by the rays of their flashlight a sight they were not likely ever to forget. The rosy fire of many rubies glowed and gleamed within the steel box. It was a trifle more than half full of the rare variety of

ruby known as "pigeon blood." On top of the wealth of precious stones, General Wynne Farley's hard-won treasure, lay the ruby temple.

"Oh, you bird!" Ralph cried, addressing the temple. "You certainly had me going. And to think, I almost owned you."

"The lost ruby convoy!" Jimmy exclaimed wonderingly. "Look at those rubies; hummers, I'll say. And they must have been mined up in this region. It's great to find boxes of shiners, but I'd rather have the fun of digging for them myself."

"Wake up! These rubies belong to Farley. You'll have plenty of chance to dig your own rosy sparklers." Bret gave Jimmy a vigorous poke in the ribs.

"You fellows are going to share these rubies with me," Farley cut in quickly. "Why, if I hadn't come up here with you, I'd never have got on the trail of the lost convoy. Chuma and I stood in danger of being ambushed and murdered by dacoits. There must have been a large band of them until the big herd got busy and trampled some of them under."

"Speaking for Ralph and myself, I'd prefer that you keep the rubies, Farley," Malcolm Edwards said. "We have been very successful as jewel hunters of diamonds, emeralds and pearls. We'd like to have a try at ruby digging."

"I'd like you to give me just one ruby, Farley, as a souvenir of this trip," Green declared.

"Yes; that's the idea," Bret approved. "I'll have mine made into a scarf pin."

"You may give me a pair for cuff links, if you like," Jimmy said, laughing.

"You're a hopeless bunch, but I'm not through with you yet." The Englishman's gray eyes were very friendly as they went from face to face of the men who had proved themselves such staunch comrades to him. He lifted the box from the cave floor and thrust his right hand into the massed rubies, letting the gleaming stones drop through his long fingers.

"What's this?" His fingers had come into contact with a small object which he guessed to be a leather pocketbook. Once extricated from among the rubies he saw it as a little black leather notebook. "It's a book," he announced in an excited voice. Hurriedly, he opened it at the first page. "Listen to this!" he exclaimed, his voice rising to a mild shout. "'My Journal, General Wynne Farley. A Record of Events Relating to Important Happenings While in Upper Burma Ruby Prospecting.'"

CHAPTER XIX

THE JOURNAL OF GENERAL WYNNE FARLEY

“**N**OW we are going to find out what it’s all about!” Ralph ejaculated in a tone of satisfaction. His jubilant cry broke the hush which had fallen upon the group.

“Yes; I have word from Grandy at last, after twenty years,” Farley said solemnly. “Shall I begin, and read it to you?” he asked.

“Uh-h-h. If you don’t, we’ll think you are mighty stingy,” Jimmy told the Englishman.

A general murmur of anticipation rose from the others. The jewel hunters were hardly less interested than Farley in the Journal of General Wynne Farley.

“‘September 18,’” Farley began. “‘I should have begun this little record before, but have been busy and have thus neglected to start it. Our journey has been singularly uneventful, thus far. We have kept a bright lookout for dacoits, but have seen none. Gulo declares that the dacoits have a stronghold up here; that there are three or four hundred of the robbers in the band and that Lalla Dhon, the worst bandit since Nana Sahib, is their chief. Gulo

is a strange fellow. He seems to hate the very name of Lalla Dhon. I asked him one day if he had ever met Lalla Dhon. "I have seen him, Sahib General, and I have seen a cobra. I liked the cobra best." That is what Gulo said to me. Then I told him I had known Ashim Dhon, Lalla's father, who had been my friend, and who had given me a talisman for having once saved him from drowning in the Ganges. He seemed much amazed to hear it. I did not tell him the talisman was the Temple of Light. I have kept my word to Ashim Dhon, Rajah of Rhambour, who asked me to promise never to reveal the fact that he had given me the temple. He did not wish Lalla to have it, for he knew his son was not worthy. He knew, too, if Lalla were to discover that I had the temple he would hunt me down and try to murder me for it. I hope Gulo is wrong about the dacoit den. We have the splendid results of eight years of hard work at stake. We shall have to travel at night for a while, as well as by day, in order to get out of this perilous region. I shall not feel secure until we are out of the jungle and in Katha.'

"Now I understand why Grandy would never tell any one where he got the temple!" Farley looked up from the little book to exclaim. Flashlight in one hand, book in the other, the face of the young Englishman was bright with the joy of discovery.

“September 22. We have been held back from traveling for the past two days by a bad wind storm, followed by rain. Luckily we found a cave partially roofed by rock and have managed to keep dry. It is crowded, since there are thirteen of us. We hope to be able to resume the journey to-morrow. If only we had elephants. Those we brought to the hills died. I cannot help feeling worried concerning our progress. We must have close to a million pounds' worth of rubies. I am thankful our men are loyal. They are to have a present apiece of rubies when we reach Mandalay.

“September 28. In two or three days we expect to be out of the hills and into the last stretch of jungle before reaching Katha. While I dread the perils of the jungle, for death is always at hand there, still I shall be relieved to leave this lonely rocky region behind. Higgins, one of my oldest men, said to-day that he surprised a fierce-looking native who was stretched flat on the ground apparently watching our camp. He all but stepped upon the fellow, who jumped up like a flash and ducked into a thicket. Higgins did not shoot him, or follow him, believing him to be harmless. I am not so sure he was harmless. Higgins could not tell whether the Hindoo had a dah in his hand or belt or not.

“September 30. To-day, while three of my men were at the spring, they came upon a native

who had been stabbed in a dozen places. He was still alive so they brought him into camp. I dressed his wounds and tried to make him comfortable. He told me that we had been watched by dacoits for a long time. They had waited for the convoy to start, and had trailed it. He had found a good-sized ruby and had been set upon by three companions and stabbed. They had taken the ruby and left him to die. He owned to being a dacoit and gave us the bad news that they had gathered in number to attack us at a place not more than a day's journey from our present camp. He advised me to hide the rubies somewhere in the hills and strike out for the nearest military station through the jungle. I do not favor any such proceeding. I know of no particular hiding place in the hills which I should consider safe for the rubies. We are not many miles from the jungle now, but I dislike the idea of changing the route through the jungle, which I know, for a practically unbroken trail. I must talk to Gulo about this. He is very clever in such emergencies.

“September 30. Midnight. It is true. Gulo has been out scouting to-night and has located a positive army of dacoits. There are three hundred of them, at least, so he has reported to me. He talked with the wounded dacoit before he died and the fellow told him of a secret hiding place for the strong box, not more than

three miles from here. The dacoit had learned of it from a very old Hindoo priest. Gulo believes the fellow spoke the truth. He says we had best take the strong box there before daylight. I am making a note of this in my journal. In the event that I should be killed during the undertaking, it is possible that this record may fall into English hands.

“October 1. Five o'clock, A. M. I have been through a strange night adventure—one I shall never forget. Gulo and I left camp shortly after midnight and made good speed over a well-defined trail. It did not seem to me that there could be any very obscure hiding place in the vicinity of such a plain trail. Gulo only laughed at my lack of confidence in what the dying dacoit had said. It was very dark, but Gulo evidently knew where he was going. At about half past one he brought up near what I took to be an up-standing piece of rock about four feet high and two feet wide. Instead it was an idol; the stone image of an old Hindoo god. In front of it was a large flat stone that had the appearance of a small platform. Judge my surprise when Gulo said: “Be not amazed, Sahib Farley. I am going to make the stone move. Beneath it is a cave. Only Riga, the dacoit, knew the secret. Now he is dead. So shall only you and I know it.” Then he showed me how, by stamping in a certain way on the upper side of the platform, the platform could

be set in motion, swaying back and forth, until it stood upright in the center of the opening it concealed. The swaying stone, as nearly as I could see, worked upon a central pivot. The small flashlight I carried was inadequate, but I dared not use a larger for fear it might betray us to a possible lurker in the darkness who had managed to pick up our trail.

“ ‘Gulo fastened one end of a stout rope about the old stone god and we went down into the cavern on the rope. He went down first, at his own earnest plea. The size of the underground cavern astonished me. It was at least twelve feet long by eight wide. A tall man could stand erect in it, his head not touching the cave roof. Gulo believes that it was once a secret meeting place of Hindoo priests. It is an ideal hiding place for the strong box. I am tempted to take the advice of the dacoit in one respect. I am beginning to believe that I should have strong military escort when I take it to Mandalay. By detouring I hope to be able to dodge the dacoit army this brown fellow declared was waiting to ambush us at the northeastern edge of the jungle. I do not deem it advisable, however, to follow his advice about breaking into the jungle, haphazard, in order to reach Fort Clemens. It is the most immediate to us, but at least three hundred miles from here, by the shortest route. I have never run away yet from a risky situation, I shall not

begin now. I believe we can overcome this perilous obstacle by strategy. Besides, there are thirteen of us, and we are all fighters.

“‘I am half sorry I did not place my ruby temple in the strong box in the cave. Still, I should feel lost without it. I promised Ashim that I would always carry it on my person. Gulo has been out on a short scouting tour. He says we had best start at once. He has circled the spot where we have been encamping and has not seen any dacoits. He has begged me to let him go ahead, so that at the first sign of danger he can run back to us with the alarm. He is a wonderful fellow; far more my friend than almost any white man I know. He is the very soul of loyalty.’

“‘And that’s all.’ Arthur Farley’s strong features registered blank disappointment as he made the regretful announcement. The journal had been ended in the middle of a page. The remaining sheets of paper in the little book were blank.

“‘Thanks to Ganga Singh, we know the rest of the story,’ Ralph reminded the Englishman. “‘He was a pretty good sort of fellow, after all.’”

CHAPTER XX

THE SONS OF ASHIM DHON

FOR a little longer the adventurers remained in the underground chamber wonderingly discussing the amazing events and revelations of the morning. Sight of the steel strong box, alone, the cover thrown back to disclose the wealth of rubies it contained, assured them that the mystery of the lost ruby convoy had been solved at last.

"We must get above ground again," Malcolm Edwards said finally when a lull in the low-toned conversation of the group at length ensued. "First we must perform a last friendly act for Singh. I know of no better burial place for him than in this underground room."

With the help of Green and Farley, Mr. Edwards lifted the oldest son of Ashim Dhon and laid him upon the spread black cloak he had worn into the underground room. They straightened his arms, wrapped the voluminous black garment about him and left him to his last long sleep.

They had left the swaying stone swung wide. It was therefore an easy matter to climb up

the little ladder and step out upon solid earth once more. As each in turn of the adventurers emerged from the underground room he felt a flash of horror as he glimpsed the swollen discolored features of the dacoit leader, Lalla Dhon. The body of the dead bandit chief lay a little to one side of the swaying stone.

"What shall we do with him, Oom Dad?" Ralph made scornful indication of the dead robber. Mr. Edwards was just emerging from the underground chamber. Behind him came Arthur Farley, carrying the precious strong box.

"We must bury him. I don't fancy the task, but we are white men, you know," the jewel man reminded with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, shucks! I know an easier way than that, Daddo. Lay him beside Ganga Singh down there." Ralph gave a quick nod toward the square opening above the underground room. "After all, they were brothers."

"It's hard to believe they were the sons of Ashim Dhon," Arthur Farley said musingly. "Ashim Dhon was noted for his philanthropy and good works. I've heard tales about Lalla Dhon ever since I was a youngster, but supposed his name was not a true one. Bandits hardly ever keep their true names."

"Ganga Singh had the making of a great man in him if only he had given himself a chance to live in the best way," Green spoke the dead bazaar keeper's epitaph.

"I can never forget that he was my Grandy's loyal friend." Arthur Farley added this earnest tribute to that of Green.

The adventurers found it a fairly difficult task to lower the body of the dead bandit into the underground chamber. Finally it was accomplished and the body of Lalla Dhon was placed beside that of his elder brother. As the swaying stone was swung into place the little group of watchers wondered if ever again it would be lifted. So far as they were concerned they were of the opinion that it would not be.

"Let's have another round of coffee," hospitably proposed Ralph when the adventurers had again reached the spot where they had breakfasted. The remains of the meal was spread on the camp oilcloth just where they had left it when they had run to answer Ganga Singh's wild cry.

Ralph had the coffee pot on the relighted oil stove again in a twinkling. There still remained the last lot of biscuits he had baked and these he placed in the middle of the oilcloth with the buoyant invitation: "Come and get it."

His comrades found themselves quite ready for another round of coffee and biscuits. While they ate they discussed in low tones the strange happenings and revelations of the morning.

"There is only one thing to do that I can see," Malcolm Edwards at length declared.

"That is turn around and take the strong box back to civilization at once."

"Oh, come now. You don't imagine, do you, that I'd expect any such sacrifice at your hands?" Arthur Farley said in a tone of quick expostulation. "When you fellows get tired of ruby digging and are ready to go back, then will be time enough for me to take the strong box into Mandalay."

"Let me ask you a question. What will you do with the box while we are up here?" Green looked quizzically at the Englishman.

"Trot it around with me wherever I go. You are all entitled to a share of the rubies. Once we have divided the rubies, you'll have the same number of shiners to worry over as I." Farley spoke with friendly determination.

His reply evoked a chorus of noisy objections from the jewel hunters. A good-natured discussion arose which went on for some time. Farley was determined on an even division of the treasure his grandfather had given his life for. The adventurers did not consider themselves entitled to any such generosity on Farley's part.

"No, Farley," was Mr. Edwards's ultimatum. "We will each accept a ruby or two, not only to please you, but also as a reminder of this particular prospecting trip. Later, we shall come back here and have a try at this region. Now, my advice to you is the advice which your

grandfather disregarded, and which cost him his life. Take a cross-cut through the jungle to the fort your grandfather mentions in his journal, provided you know that such a fort still stands."

"Yes; Fort Clemens is still standing and garrisoned," Farley responded.

"Then we must try to make a quick trip to it. Once there you can secure the protection of a detachment of soldiers as far as Mandalay. The amount of rubies, and the quality of the stones, make it imperative that you should take every precaution against an attack by dacoits en route," argued Malcolm Edwards. "At present things seem in our favor. The big herd put a crimp in the dacoits' plans, I'll say. Lalla Dhon is dead, and the dacoits are without a leader."

"Only they don't know he is dead," put in Ralph, "unless some of the blamed snakes were hiding in the offing and saw what happened to their precious chief. Think there were any of 'em around, Chuma?"

"No." Chuma's "no" was decided. "I have searched the bushes well since we came here. There are no dacoits near. I do not believe they picked up our trail after we left the old house. Perhaps those that Chang did not trample are still waiting there for the return of Lalla Dhon. Ah, it is good that he will never return. Now I know what I will do. I will

find a large fungus and write on it that Lalla died from the hamadryad's sting. I will then hang this writing around the neck of the old idol. It will scare any dacoits who see it, for they will think the writing was made by the old Hindoo god who has an evil-looking face."

Chuma was thoroughly of an opinion with Malcolm Edwards that it would be wiser to cut across the jungle to the fort with the strong box of rubies than to linger with it in that wild northern region while they delved for rubies. "Of what good is a strong box of rubies if we are all dead by the dahs of dacoits?" he pointed out soberly.

"Do you think you can guide us cross-lots through the jungle to the fort, Chuma?" Farley asked him anxiously. "It will be a pretty tough job, won't it?"

"It will be hard to break a trail in some places, my Sahib," Chuma admitted. "Still, the jungle is the jungle. Once one has traveled it, it loses its terror. It is a place of death, but if we are careful we may live to go anywhere," he ended with a whimsical lift of his bare brown shoulders.

"Once I get the strong box back to civilization you may count on me to come up here with you on your return," the Englisman earnestly assured the adventurers. "I only wish we had that map Grandy made of the ruby region up here. But it was stolen. It must have been

Dhon who stole it at the time he was living in the Arlington."

"I'd rather have that map than the strong box of rubies," Malcolm Edwards said, laughing. "It would be more valuable to me. You see we love the excitement of digging up the stones, Farley. It means more to us than the mere monetary value of the jewels themselves."

"I understand," Farley nodded.

Chuma sat staring reflectively at Malcolm Edwards. He was extremely fond of the kindly jewel hunter and always anxious to please him. Presently he rose from where he had been sitting and slipped away without a word.

It was not long before he returned, a curiously elated expression shining from his dark eyes. In one hand he was carrying something resembling a folded sheet of yellow-white paper. He walked straight up to Malcolm Edwards, who sat at ease, hands clasped about his knees, listening to Farley, who was still endeavoring to force a part of the ruby findings of the strong box upon the adventurers.

"Here is something for you, Sahib Edwards." Chuma tendered the folded paper to the jewel man. The latter took it, eyes fixed inquiringly upon the Hindoo.

"What is it, Chuma?" he asked, smiling, then began unfolding the yellowed paper. An instant later a cry of surprise burst from his lips.

He leaned forward toward Farley, who was sitting almost opposite him, exclaiming: "Look, Farley! A map. Is it—can it be—the map? See; it's an old one!"

His keen eyes darting from one point on the map to another he said excitedly, "It's one your grandfather made, I believe. His name is at the top of it. But how——"

"Where did you get it, Chuma?" Farley cried out in eager amazement. "You've not had it long. I'm sure of that."

Chuma laughed in quiet amusement. "No, I have not had it long," he said. "It is the true map that your grandfather gave to your mother to keep. I have done that which I thought not to do. I have made the big stone sway once more and have been down in the secret place where are the bodies of the sons of Ashim Dhon. I heard Sahib Edwards say he wished for the map. Then the thought came to me that if it was Lalla Dhon who stole the map perhaps he had brought it with him when he came up here. It was true. I found it in an inside pocket of his robe. So he must have decided to come up here and prospect for rubies, too."

Chuma's calm explanation was received with a concerted shout from the astonished jewel hunters. Ralph proposed three cheers for the Hindoo, which were given with hearty good will.

"You've got us all beaten for spiffy stunts,

Chuma." Ralph brought down a warmly admiring hand on Chuma's shoulder.

"Of what use is this map to a dead man? Besides it never belonged to him. I kept thinking this. Then I went to see if he had it. Now it is found and my Sahib Edwards and all my Sahibs will be able to find rubies, too. We shall follow this map when we return to this ruby country. I am sure that it is the true map of the Sahib general."

"Yes; it is." Malcolm Edwards and Farley had the map spread out between them now and were interestedly going over it. It was Farley who identified it positively as his grandfather's work.

"This means clear sailing when we come back here," he said, tapping the map with the tip of a finger. "According to this map we are in the heart of the ruby belt now. If you'd like to stop a week or so and try your luck——"

"No." Malcolm Edwards shook his head. "Duty first, and pleasure afterward. Jewel hunting is our pleasure, you know, but it's our duty to see you safely back to Mandalay with the strong box. Then we'll come back here and fill a strong box of our own with rubies," he finished jokingly.

"Betcha we will." Ralph energetically expressed the feelings of his comrades. The Adventure Boys were ready to brave the perils of a jungle trail, as yet untrodden, for the sake of

friendship for Arthur Farley. At the same time they were looking hopefully forward to their return to the ruby country. Nor could they then know that before they saw the hills of Upper Burma again another jewel prospect would claim them, furnishing them with stranger adventures than even that of the lost ruby convoy.

THE END

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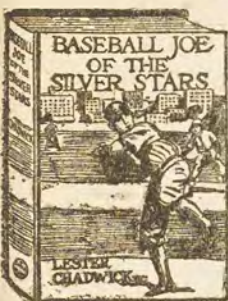
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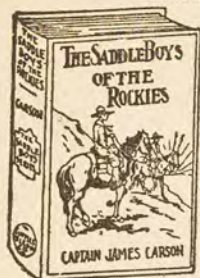
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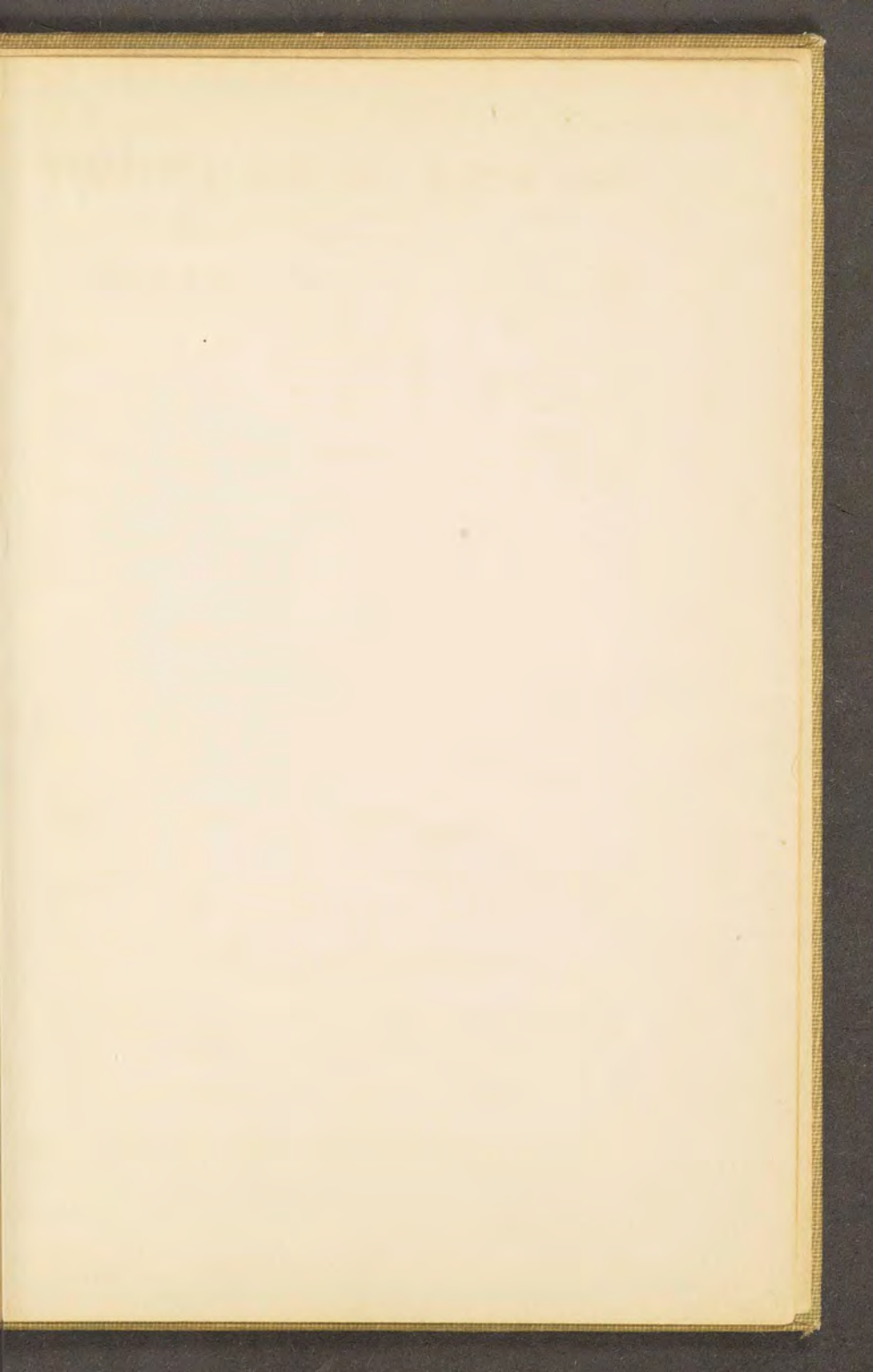
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